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INTRODUCTION

JULIUS SOLARIS

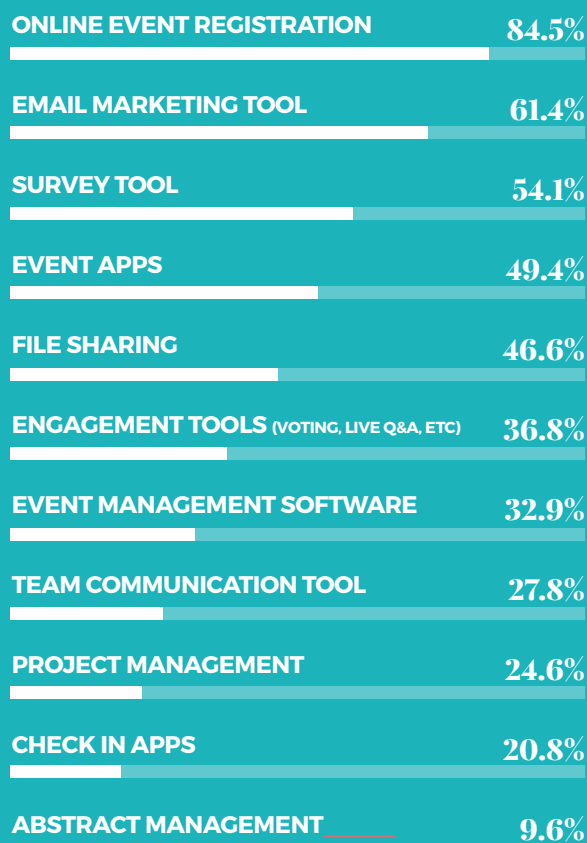
Increased competition is one of the main concerns of event professionals in 2018. For corporate and experiential planners that means higher no-shows, missing out on important VIPs and eventually not delivering to sponsors or internal stakeholders.

With a clear uptick in the economy, more companies are relying on events as the most effective weapon to engage customers, stakeholders, and employees.

That's why reaching out to prospective attendees has evolved from a mere email dump, an unorganized list and a bored click on 'send', into a subtle art.

If you excel at the art of RSVP, your event will have an immense competitive advantage. This is what this report is about. We want to elevate your invitation practices and make them become bulletproof. Email marketing is living a second life, with 62% of event planners using an email marketing tool¹.

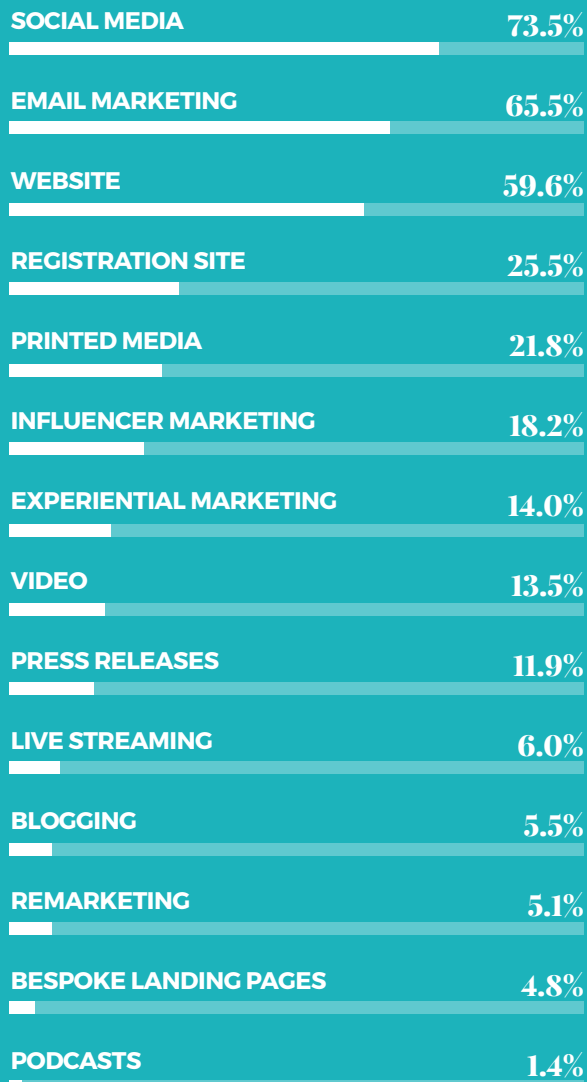
Which event tech tools do you use?



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1 EventMB. The 5Ws Event Marketing Plan (2018 edition): Strategies, Tactics and Trends Framework. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.eventmanagerblog.com/event-marketing>

What are the most effective tools for your event marketing?



It is voted the second most effective tool (after social media) according to recent research².

How great would it be to gain the full attention of your invitees to easily convert them into attendees?

How will we get you there? Easy! We will cover:

- ☑ **The modern RSVP strategy.** All the new essentials you need to reach the people that matter.
- ☑ **Crafting the perfect event invitation.** What you need to include in your invitation to maximize the conversion potential of your event.
- ☑ **RSVP Tactics.** A practical approach to RSVP with the best tools and tips to get action and hack your way into your invitees' attention.

Modern event marketing requires far more sophisticated approaches to be effective. This report is your companion to deliver quick strategies and tactics that work.

Let's start!

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2 EventMB. The State of the Event Industry Survey. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.eventmanagerblog.com/state-event-industry-research-2018/>

CREATING AN *RSVP Strategy*

JULIUS SOLARIS

The challenge in 2018 is to get the attendees that matter in the room. If you are an event professional, getting people in a room is not a big deal. You know the levers to pull to fill up the space.

What about the right people though?

The new diktat of the online and offline world is quality, not quantity.

Picture an unticketed corporate event with a room full of other suppliers or worse, competitors! That is becoming a common scenario at many events.

The fact is that the attendees you need are in demand. Many other event professionals are doing a better job at reaching out to them.

The perfect RSVP strategy has three common characteristics:

- ☑ It reaches attendance numbers.
- ☑ It minimizes no-shows.
- ☑ It brings the right people together.

*The new diktat
of the online and
offline world
is quality, not
quantity.*

But let's take a step back. Do you even know who your target attendees are? We are not talking about vague personas. What about actual names and profiles of those you need to reach?

Whether your answer is yes or no, we need to start our strategy by discussing the new rules of targeting, which focuses on:

- ✔ Good database management.
- ✔ Allocating sufficient time to your RSVP strategy.
- ✔ Optimum timing for sending out communications.
- ✔ Storytelling to hook the invitee.
- ✔ Effective follow up via different channels.
- ✔ A well-planned strategy to minimize the drop-out rate.
- ✔ Taking an Account Based Marketing approach.

CLEAN UP YOUR DATABASE:

Target Only the Invitees that Matter



When was the last time you cleaned up your database? If your answer is more than 6 months ago, it's time to start spring cleaning your list again.

We all like massive numbers to share with our sponsors or simply to feel good about ourselves, but how many actual relevant prospects are in your database?

The perfect RSVP strategy is based on a solid, engaged, responsive database of emails. Here are a few steps to make sure your database is clean:

- ☑ **ELIMINATE HARD BOUNCES.** If your software does not eliminate them automatically, delete them manually. There is no use in having addresses that bounce.
- ☑ **SEND A BREAK-UP EMAIL TO NON-OPENERS.** Look at the last campaigns you've sent (if you don't have a tool to see who opens your emails, you should investigate that asap). If some of your subscribers haven't opened in a while, send them an email to say you are removing them from the list and if they want they can re-subscribe at any time. This practice makes your list healthy and better focused.

- ✔ **IDENTIFY GATEKEEPERS.** It's highly unlikely a C-level suite will open your messages. Do you have alternative contacts for them? Do you have access to their PA? Can you find out by calling them? Make sure you have other ways to reach the people that matter.
- ✔ **ENSURE RECIPIENT LOCATION MATCHES YOUR GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS.** Does it make sense for subscribers in Japan to RSVP to a 3-hour event in New York? You don't want to send invitations to contacts that have no chance of showing up.
- ✔ **SEGMENT YOUR LIST EFFECTIVELY.** Proper segmentation of your contact list is important in order to make sure you reach out only to those that are likely to come. The criteria for segmentation can be budget, seniority, location, motivations, past attendance. The type of event, the duration, the monetary commitment will define your targeting. Focus your efforts only on those that matter. Save scope and energy.
- ✔ **ENRICH YOUR DATABASE.** As much as your invitation will be perfectly crafted, some guests will simply not open it. This may be because they are busy, because they don't check emails regularly, because they hang out somewhere else. Add as much context as possible to your database. A LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram or Twitter profile can be requested at registration, so you can follow up with them later on when a new invitation is ready. In some cases, a phone number should sit together with the name and email. The phone is one of the strongest allies to make sure you increase attendance and minimize no-shows.

TIME MANAGEMENT: *Give the Right Time to your Strategy*

I know how you feel. 'Are you asking me to go through each and every email in my database? I don't have time for that!'

Time is an interesting concept. When it gets to event planning and marketing we feel we have time for many things that have become almost irrelevant.

The truth is that if you are struggling with getting the right people in the room, dealing with a great number of no-shows or hitting your attendance targets, you have a problem.

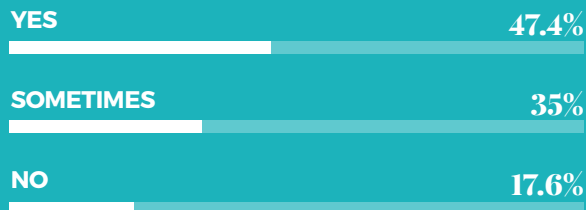
This problem needs time to be fixed. You can source that time externally but if you hold the reins of your event, you will need to guide contractors or members of the team to do the job right. No workarounds or quick fixes. Allocate the time your RSVP strategy and implementation deserve.

Database management, contact nurturing and data harvesting should be a constant task in your planning process. It is not a one-off. It's a



If you are struggling with getting the right people in the room, dealing with a great number of no-shows or hitting your attendance targets, you have a problem.

Do you analyze invites/ email data?

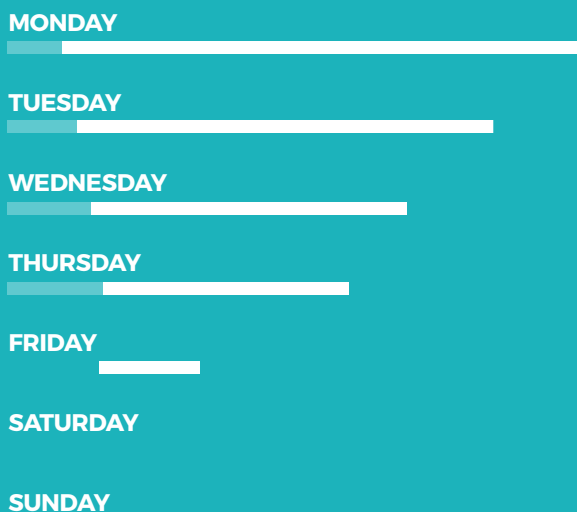


continuous activity that deserves the correct amount of time to be carried out. A whopping 35% of event professionals hardly look at analytics from their email marketing software and 18% of them do not look at analytics at all¹. In the increasingly competitive environment we are experiencing, dedicating the right amount of time to analyzing performance will make the difference to your marketing.

Timing the actual roll out of your RSVP strategy is also a big part of ensuring success. Research from zkipster suggests that how far in advance you send out the invitation does not affect the open or click rate². Yet, you should be aware that not giving enough time for RSVP will inevitably have an impact if diaries have gotten busy and particularly if your event requires travel and accommodation.

The same research also states that sending emails earlier in the week will have a positive impact on your open rates.

Email impact on open rates



1 EventMB. **The 5Ws Event Marketing Plan (2018 edition): Strategies, Tactics and Trends Framework**. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.eventmanagerblog.com/event-marketing>

2 zkipster. **5 Data-proven Ways to Send More Successful Online Invitations**. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.zkipster.com/blog/send-more-successful-online-invitations/>

TELLING THE STORY OF YOUR EVENT: *Convert Prospects into Attendees*

What is the first invitation touchpoint you received from an event that you attended months ago? It's highly likely some bogus press announcement about partnerships no attendee cares about or an early bird call for registration.

These two messages, one for corporate, one for commercial ticket-selling events, are the most evident examples of practices from the Nineties that we still think are relevant.

Think about reconnecting with an old friend over dinner. The first topic you bring up is how much you are going to pay for the dinner or the new relationship you are in, talking about you, you, you, you. Very annoying if you are the other party. Yet, many event planners have no problem reconnecting with our beloved guests or with new prospects with some cheap money talk.

—
*Is your RSVP
strategy stuck in
the Nineties?*

The focus of your RSVP strategy is the invitee. Not you.

The perfect event invitation that converts into highly positive RSVPs takes the reader on a journey. What will I get if I attend your event? What's in it for me?

The clever event strategist shows invitees a clear path towards change that the event will help to deliver. They tell a story about how, by attending the event, there will be a clear outcome. They describe that vision and they make it valuable and tangible to the potential attendee.

Why do we attend events?

- ✔ To learn.
- ✔ To be entertained.
- ✔ To connect in person with other attendees.
- ✔ To filter through the noise of information overload.

These are universal objectives that every event can relate to. Now, it is the time to break it down and really identify the 'what's in it for me' for your attendees. Your entire communication, and specifically your invitations, should reflect this thinking.

We don't attend events based on price alone anymore. Especially in the corporate environment, experiential marketing, and high profile meetings, price is just a detail. We want a full-blown learning, entertaining, connected experience that proves our boss was right to approve our attendance.

SECURING ATTENDANCE:

Your RSVP Tool Mix

Choosing the right tools for engagement is as crucial as getting your message right. You may have the perfect invitation out there; amazing graphics, great story, brilliant value proposition but the prospective attendees still simply do not see what you have in store for them.

A modern RSVP tool mix combines traditional and non-traditional tools for the best possible impact.

Traditional tools:

- ✓ Email.
- ✓ Direct Mail.
- ✓ Phone.
- ✓ Fax.

Non-traditional methods:

- ✓ Social Media.
- ✓ Social Media Advertising.
- ✓ Search Engine Marketing.
- ✓ Social and Search Remarketing.
- ✓ Video.
- ✓ Website Live Chat.
- ✓ Influencer Marketing.
- ✓ Webinars.

Choosing the right tools for engagement is as crucial as getting your message right.



Your bulletproof RSVP strategy counts on the perfect balance of traditional and non-traditional tools. To find this balance you need to profile your attendees. Here are some questions to ask:

- ✔ Do they respond to email?
- ✔ Do they talk about our event topic on social networks?
- ✔ Do they discuss attending our events, or competitors' events, online?
- ✔ If so, on which social networks?
- ✔ Have they interacted with our competitors on social networks?
- ✔ How did they find out about our event?
- ✔ Have they mentioned on previous registration forms how they heard about past events?

Of course, there are many more questions you could ask. The above examples give you an indication of the items to consider to identify your audience's behavior. You need to be able to establish a pattern of interaction to define where to invest your time and resources to get maximum attention.

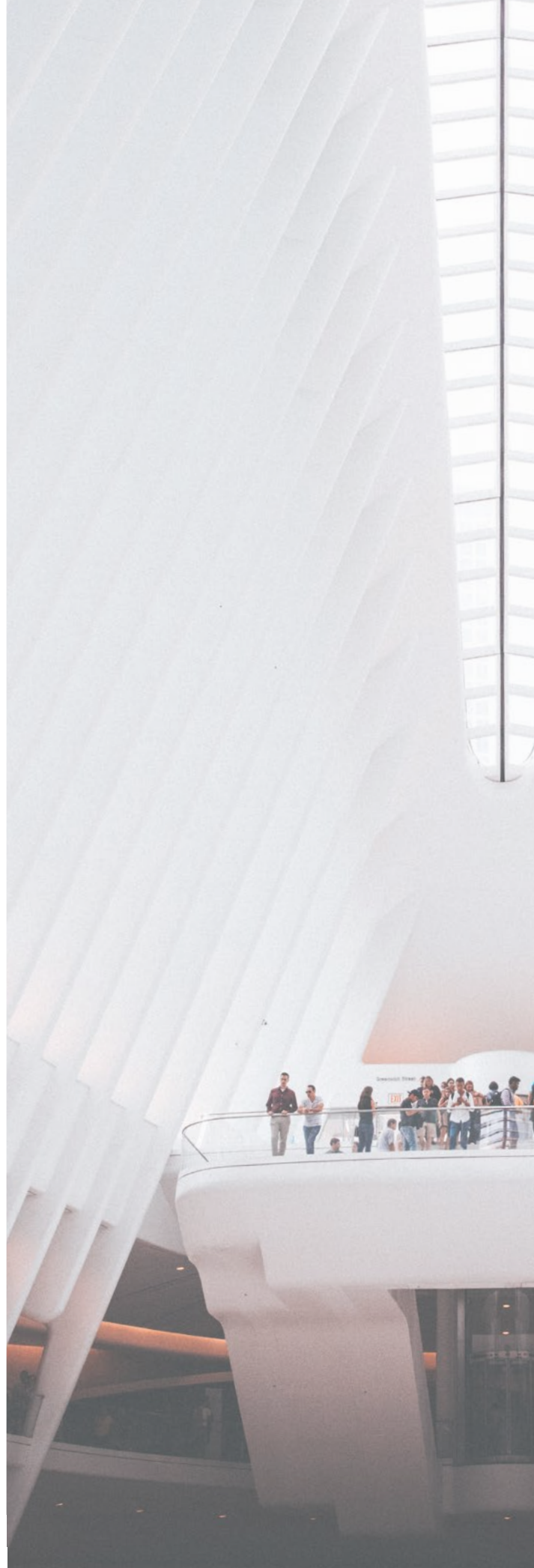
Mixing a very traditional and a very non-traditional contact method has been proven to be extremely successful in grabbing attention. Whenever you break the pattern of 'what is expected' you can count on more consideration from your audience.

It shows you made an effort to reach out in a better, more valuable fashion.

An example of creative RSVP tool selection could be a promotional item sent via direct mail

combined with a *remarketing campaign on social networks* that reminds them to RSVP to the event.

If you are telling a story with your invitation you can use different tools to present it differently and hit different trigger points. An email invitation with a clear list of the benefits of attending can be combined with video on Facebook or YouTube, with testimonials from previous years attendees confirming the value.



MAKING SURE EVERYONE SHOWS UP: *Reducing Non-attendance*

No-shows and last minute changes of RSVP are among the most annoying pet peeves of event professionals. Whether you run paid or free events, you will get inevitably annoyed by those not showing up.

Consider there will always be an organic rate of no-shows. Things happen and you can always expect a percentage of attendees not showing up.

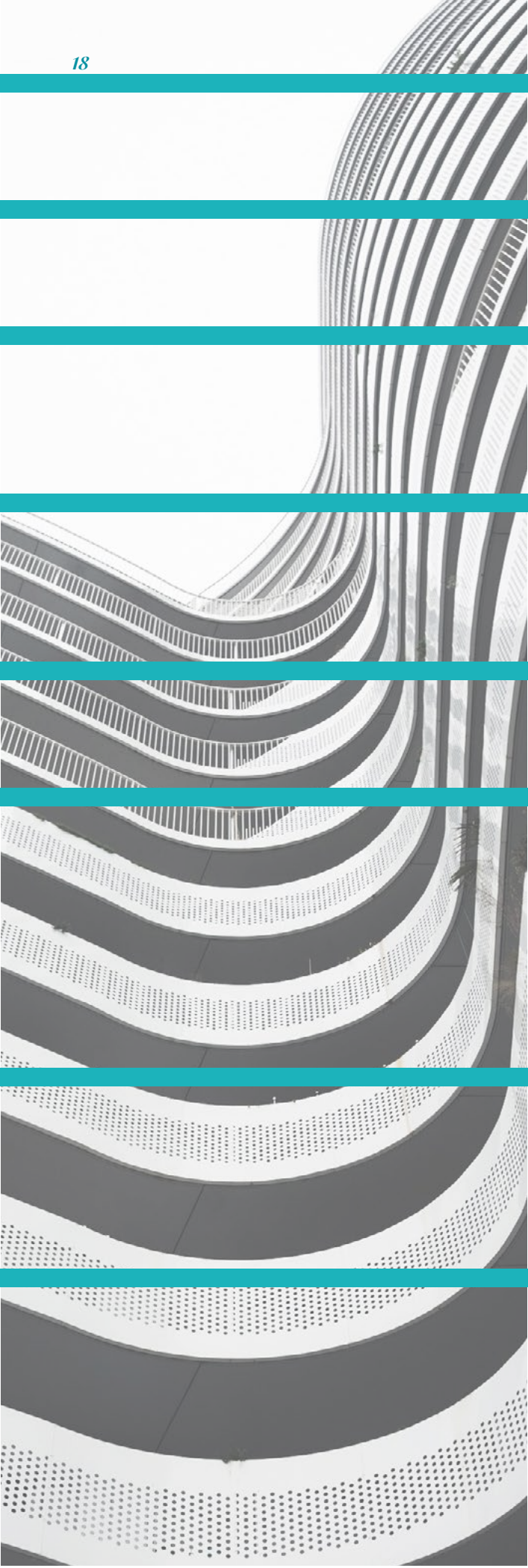
If you experience higher rates of no-shows or last minute changes of RSVP, it is time to call Houston, because we do have a problem.

There are some strategic steps you can take to make sure those that committed show up at the event:

1. Have a clear RSVP policy at sign up which clearly outlines expectations that they will attend or advise if they can no longer make it in good time before the day.
2. Consider collecting a small deposit which is returned to everyone that attends the event or used to cover the cost of the wasted place in case of non-attendance.

*Things happen
and you can
always expect
a percentage of
attendees not
showing up.*



- 
3. Communicate regularly with your attendees in the lead up to the event to keep anticipation high.
 4. Send detailed joining instructions with all of the key information anyone attending may need in a simple format.
 5. Take a collaborative approach to the event. If participants feel more involved in decisions relating to the event they are much more likely to turn up.
 6. Send automated reminders to attendees one week out, one day out, and on the day of the event and attach or link to the joining instructions for quick reference.
 7. If you have permission and access to cell phone numbers, implement text/SMS/WhatsApp reminders.
 8. Make sure attendees have a cell phone number for the organizing team which they can call in case of difficulties on the day. If someone is lost or delayed or struggling to park having some direct advice from the event team could make the difference between them making or missing the event.
 9. Let attendees know you have a waitlist and that no-shows will not be given preferential tickets in the future. Communicate that this is an exclusive event and they will lose their spot for the next one if they don't show up to this one.
 10. Develop stronger relationships with attendees in between events through increased engagement. People are less likely to let down others who they feel they know personally. If they can connect and network with other like-minded attendees ahead of the event they will also feel a greater affinity that they need to be there.

USING ACCOUNT BASED MARKETING (ABM) *for a Higher Success Rate* /

Instead of taking a broad brush approach to marketing, ABM identifies and focuses on the priority or most valuable leads. This is advanced segmentation taking a higher-level approach.

In the case of event RSVPs, ABM will pay close attention to your priority wish list of attendees, those people that really matter in terms of your event objectives.

This is relatively unexplored territory in the events industry but setting up an account based marketing strategy can be particularly valuable, especially for corporate clients and sales-focused, B2B events.

For consumer events and social occasions, your ABM strategy is likely to concentrate on your VIPs, special guests, influencers, and press.

–
*ABM pays close
attention to your
priority wish list
of attendees*

What To Consider in your ABM Strategy

STEP 1

TARGET AUDIENCE

Can you precisely pinpoint your ideal attendee?

This is the first stage in your ABM strategy. Many organizations analyze and create personas to help identify top clients and attendee types and benchmark the most important criteria. It is important to work closely with colleagues in other departments, such as marketing, sales and digital, to populate powerful segmented lists and identify the highest priorities for your event or organization.

STEP 2

SEGMENTATION AND PRIORITY

The next stage is to prioritize and segment your database of prospects. This could involve analysis of past data, interactions, and behavior, as well as additional research to confirm their suitability. Your lists can be segmented exactly as you wish. Some organizations use a priority rating and issue event invitations only to their top priority contacts first of all. After the responses and follow-ups from the first list have been explored they open it up to priority list number two and repeat the process. The fewer the places that are available for the event, the more selective and targeted the prospects need to be.

STEP 3

CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS

ABM focuses on a more personalized approach, which means much more than just using their first name in a mail out. Instead, it is an opportunity to really get to understand your audience's motivations and frustrations. Insights, such as what

information has captured their attention and how they have interacted on your website (through the use of cookies), can give a more rounded view. This information can further craft more targeted outreach and develop their interest and trust. Try to give value back to them to keep their loyalty and interest. The objective is to get them to know your brand better and increase synergy.

STEP 4

CONTINUOUS REVIEW

The ABM approach isn't a single process, it demands continuous review in terms of polishing lists and finding new contacts that matter. Circumstances change and people may no longer be your ideal attendee, so they may drop from your priority list. Others may be elevated to your hottest priority group. To be able to serve and communicate with these leads you need to make it your objective to closely follow and take a professional interest in them.

Many organizations have used the introduction of the GDPR legislation to clean their lists and actively confirm their prospects wish to keep in contact. For some, this has been as drastic as deleting their lists completely and starting from scratch to ensure compliance, or for others, it has resulted in drastically reduced database numbers. It is however much more effective to have a smaller and engaged audience, rather than contacting a vast list of people that don't have a strong vested interest in your activities.



ANATOMY *of the Perfect Event Invitation*

The perfect event invitation moves through a set of questions attendees have in the back of their minds when evaluating attendance:

ASPIRATIONAL

- ☐ How will I change?
- ☐ Who will I meet?
- ☐ Will it be worth it?

LOGISTICS

- ☐ What will happen during the event?
- ☐ Who will perform?

PHYSIOLOGICAL

- ☐ Where do I need to go? How much travel is needed?
Do I need accommodation?
- ☐ What is the time and/or money required to attend?
- ☐ Can I make it on that date?

The perfect invitation needs to address all these questions. Yet, the order is not always consequential. Our minds are complex machines and the sequence of our concerns is not necessarily bottom up or top down.

What is very peculiar for event marketers is combining these ancestral questions attendees have with best practices in email marketing and 'what tends to work', shared with us through research, feedback and our own direct experience running events.

ESSENTIALS OF AN EVENT INVITATION:

CATCHY STATEMENT

The first words of your invitation should state what the event is about. A catchy 100 characters definition of your event and what's in it for those willing to attend.

It must grab attention. In some cases, this could be the *subject line of your email*.

In essence this statement should be the WHY of the event: WHY the event happens and WHY you should attend.

You need to grab the attention of your attendees with a solid, fluff-free statement about how you will help them to achieve their goals.

WHERE AND WHEN

This section of the invitation should clearly address the physiological need of the attendee. While price or monetary components need to be held until the end of the invitation to start building value, it is time to clearly state the key details of the event. The day, the venue, the city, the country. Very often forgotten are the start and end times. A snapshot of the timing of the activities is sometimes required here for some events with a fixed, single track agenda. That will help your

prospective audience to immediately identify if they can make it and if it is worthwhile.

WHAT

This is the moment to shine. Get confident with your attendees by identifying a scenario, a problem, or a situation they can identify with. Tell them how your event will help them to achieve it, solve it or will make them better.

Be concise, use lists and bullet points of tangible benefits they will get from attending. Address concerns and propose ways to fix them (i.e. how to convince your boss to attend).

Don't use a lot of words. Nobody reads invitations anymore, we quickly scan through content.

Make the structure of the 'what' section easily scannable and rich with keywords that attract your audience.

HOW MUCH

Consider addressing the 'how much?' question here, if you plan paid, ticketed events. This is a good opportunity to offer discounts or special offers, right after you've built value for the reader. If there is no cost involved make sure this is also clearly communicated.

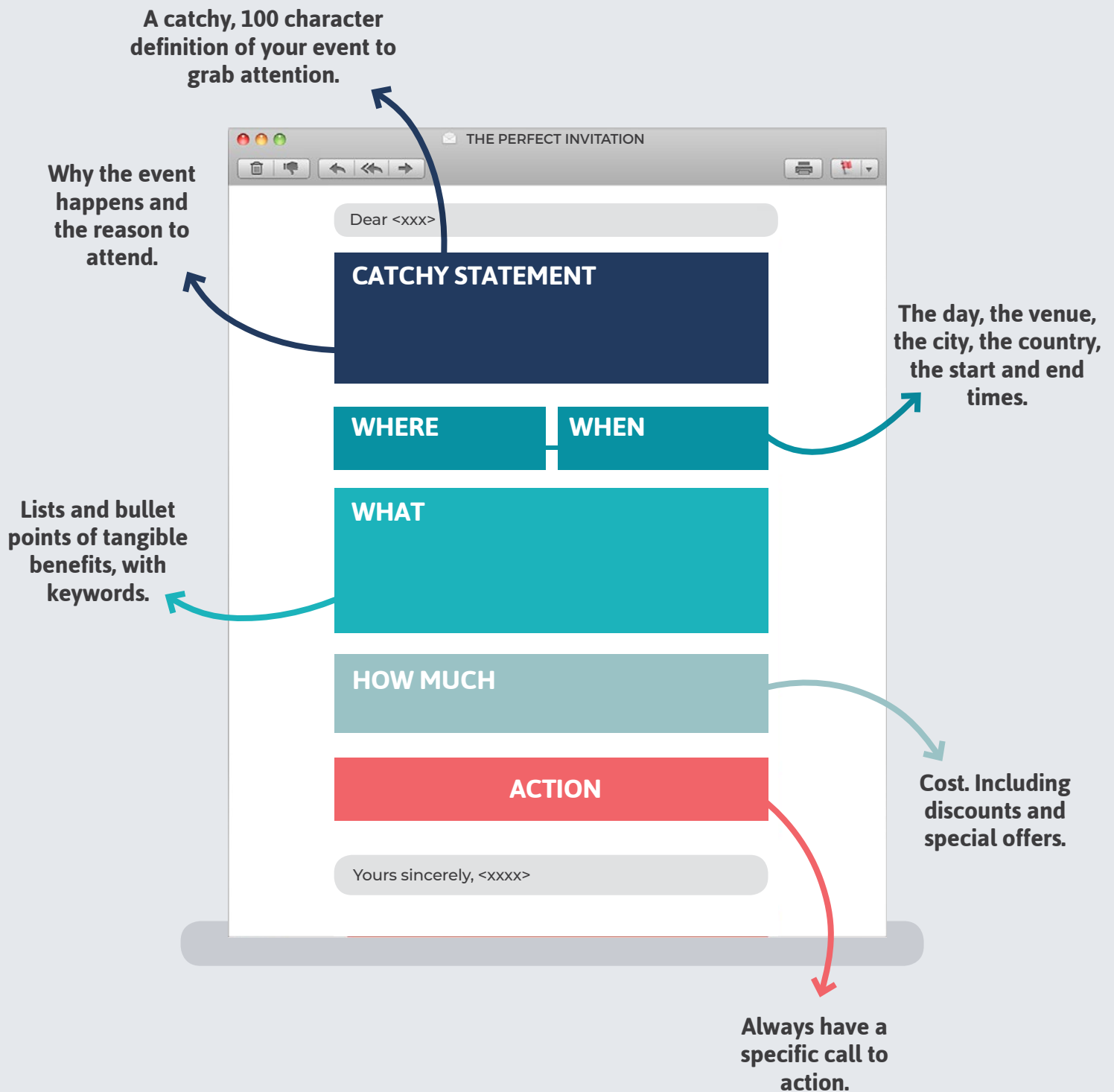
ACTION

Always have a call to action: RSVP Here, Sign Up, Buy Tickets.

Be specific. 'Find Out More' doesn't work.

If you are planning to have a sequence of invitations, you can request a different action each time. You can ask for a follow, a poll answer, an opinion. Whatever it is you can start eliciting positive actions before actually popping the \$1M question for them to attend.

THE PERFECT EVENT INVITATION



THE TACTICS THAT MATTER:

How to Increase RSVPs

BECKI CROSS

We have covered why an RSVP strategy is important, some of the main consideration and what the perfect event invitation may look like, but how does this actually take shape? This section of the report focuses on actionable tactics to increase the likelihood of receiving positive responses for your event.

Even small changes you can make in your event approach can offer big payoffs in terms of getting the right people to your event. In turn, this helps to satisfy your event stakeholders and should offer a better event experience for everyone involved and attending.

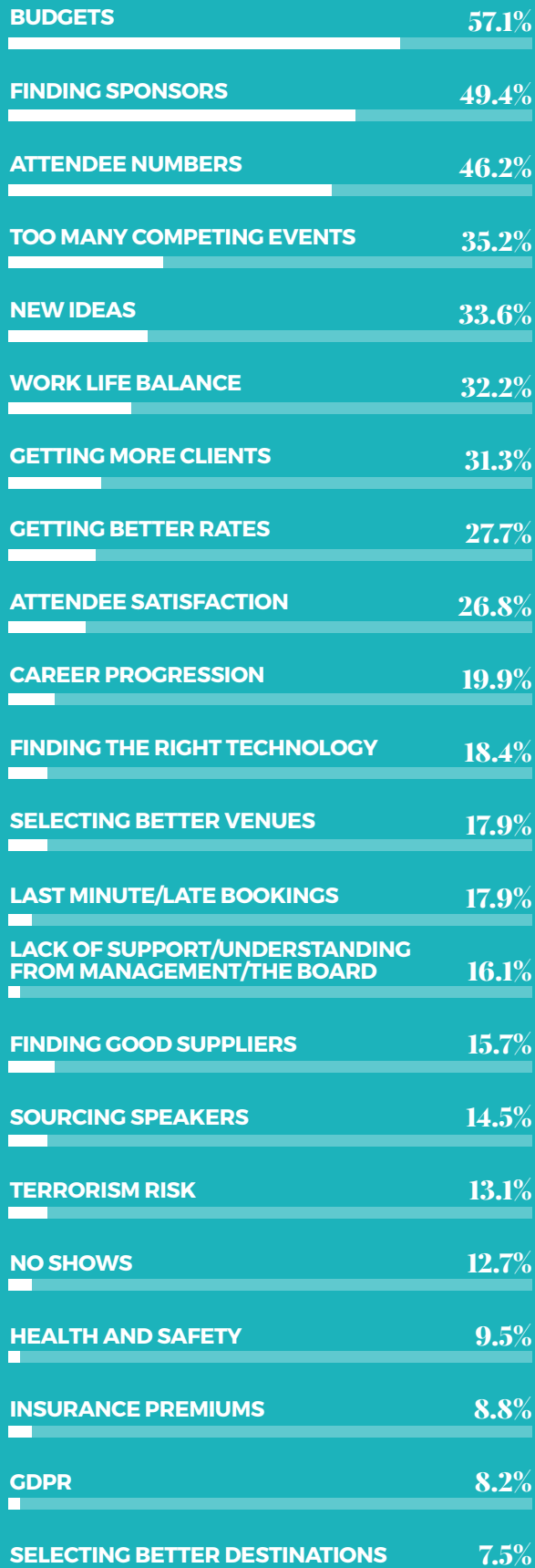
We know that event planners list attendee numbers and too many competing events as their third and fourth biggest challenges for 2018, preoccupying 46% and 35% of professional eventprofs respectively¹.

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1 EventMB. The State of the Event Industry Survey. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.eventmanagerblog.com/state-event-industry-research-2018/>

Even small changes you can make in your event approach can offer big payoffs in terms of getting the right people to your event.

What are your biggest challenges this year?



Last minute/late bookings are also on the mind of 18% of respondents and no-shows are flagged as a big concern by 12.7%.

The tactics in this section aim to address these worries and share best practice. We discuss:

- ✔ Effective communications to raise excitement and anticipation before the event.
- ✔ Tips to encourage a high RSVP rate and to fill or sell out every place at your event.
- ✔ Ideas to minimize no-shows and dropout rates.
- ✔ Actions to offer the best welcome to your guests when they arrive on site.

COHERENT BRANDING: *Make the Right Impression*

Often a lot of time has been spent developing and perfecting your company branding and also event specific branding too. This is much more than just the logo design and color palette, branding guidelines will often extend to detailed instructions about the fonts, logo positioning, reverse colors, strapline, visuals, brand voice and messaging. You may even have spent time developing mood boards and commissioning photography to communicate the event vision and theme so that it can be effectively conveyed to your audience.

Your event invitations and all touchpoints should be a continuation of your branding. Aim for all communications to be instantly recognizable and flow seamlessly across different platforms and channels.

How to ensure your event branding is consistent:

- ✔ Develop personas to identify your ideal guests. This outlines some of the key characteristics and defining features of your key audience members. Creating a fuller picture of two or three target individuals is a useful exercise in understanding them better and determining how to communicate with them more effectively.

Your event invitations and all touchpoints should be a continuation of your branding.

- 
- ✔ Set up invitation and email template designs which means that only the text and content needs to be adapted for each send out. The style and set up can become a familiar format to your attendees.
 - ✔ Your marketing approach and the content you put out may differ between social media platforms but it should still be clear and coherent and attributable to your brand.

EMAIL MARKETING: *A Critical Component of Successful Sign-ups*

Despite our email inboxes overflowing and picky spam filters, emails are a big part of modern life and remain an effective way to communicate details and share invitations to our events. To cut through the chatter though, we have to do better than ever before. Understanding the new rules of email marketing and what makes people take action will lead to a more successful event marketing strategy.

Email Software Selection: Increase Your Chances of Reaching Attendees

Email marketing software is not created equal. Some of the most important features of email marketing include the ability to personalize and segment your lists and the data analysis that can be done to dissect the success of each campaign. Be aware that certain providers also have a much higher inbox deliverability rate than others, so choose your platform carefully.

Tick all the right boxes with the right email provider:

- ☑ Encourage double opt-in to your email list.
This means that after sign up the recipient

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Emails are a big part of modern life and remain an effective way to communicate details and share invitations for our events.



gets a further email asking them to verify their email address. Double opt-in proves the recipient really wants to hear from you and improves the chance of delivery to their primary mailbox. It also weeds out typos and incorrect addresses from your list right away so it doesn't impact the validity of your list.

- ✔ Set up email templates which clearly share the important information your contacts might want to check and ensures that you are fully compliant with the law. Relevant legislation, depending on your location, may include the CAN-SPAM Act¹ which applies to all commercial messages in the US. In Canada, you must abide by the CASL² and in the UK it is the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR)³. The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) applies to communications with all EU data subjects⁴. As a minimum, the footer of any email communications should address why you are contacting them, how you come to hold their data, company contact details for the sender and your privacy policy.
- ✔ Choose software which has a robust system to handle opting-out and, ideally, allows the recipient to update their preferences at any time and with immediate effect. Some systems offer safeguards to prevent errors,

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- 1 Federal Trade Commission. CAN-SPAM Act: A Compliance Guide for Business. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/guidance/can-spam-act-compliance-guide-business>
 - 2 Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/anti.htm>
 - 3 Information Commissioner's Office. Electronic mail marketing. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-pecr/electronic-and-telephone-marketing/electronic-mail-marketing/>
 - 4 Trunomi. GDPR Portal. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.eugdpr.org/eugdpr.org.html>

such as blocking you from accidentally contacting anyone that has opted out and indicated that they do not wish to hear from you again.

- ✔ Mobile responsive emails are critical for your communications to resize to any device, and be fully readable and operational, even on mobile phones and tablets. Test this yourself on a variety of different models to make sure everything displays correctly before pushing send on any invitation or campaign.



KEY METRICS:

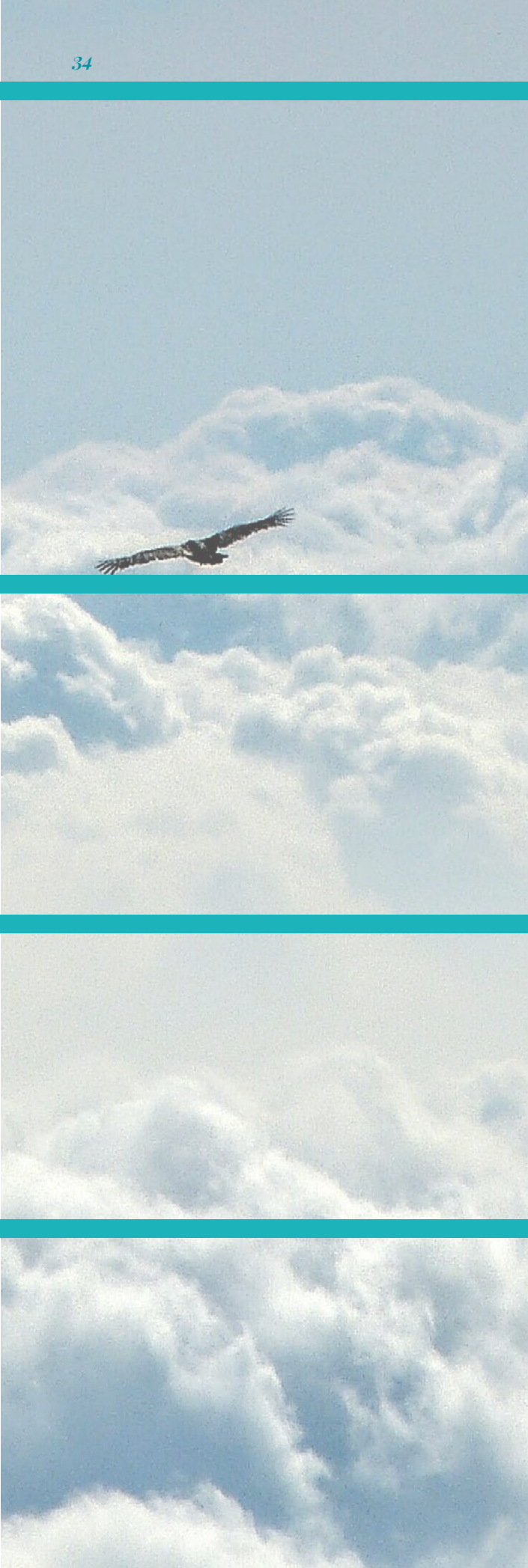
The Numbers to Help Improve Email Performance

There are a number of key metrics we should be taking careful note of to measure the success of our emails and how our audience is responding to them. We need to be continually monitoring performance against industry benchmarks and comparing to other campaigns we have issued to calculate and perfect our approach. By taking notice of positive improvements in delivery, opens, clicks and conversions we can learn more about what makes our audience tick and measure what gives the greatest results. This means we can make continuous improvements and see greater success in meeting our targets within a shorter time period.

Some metrics you need to take notice of and why they matter to event planners are outlined below:

- ☑ **Delivery Rates.** This is the number of people that your email got through to. If your email doesn't even make it to the inbox of the recipient you have zero chance of getting their attention. Keeping your data clean and lists up to date is the best way to avoid problems with delivery.

We need to be continually monitoring performance against industry benchmarks and comparing to other campaigns we have issued to calculate and perfect our approach.

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- ✔ **Open Rates.** In the age of email overwhelm some people will scan and delete your email without even opening it. Open rates are considered the basic measure of email success. There are however some inaccuracies in measuring open rates between providers using different criteria. Image blocking, preview screens and so forth can skew the real data. Nevertheless, it can give some useful guidance to compare campaigns you send out and how it is received by your database.
 - ✔ **Clicks or Click Through Rate (CTR).** If you send out highly relevant content, this will be reflected in the CTR as more people will be compelled and inspired to follow the links and call to actions. If you have more than one link in the email you will be able to check which message or information or button location performed the best.
 - ✔ **Unsubscribes.** An important metric to keep an eye on is the number of unsubscribes. If you send out emails too frequently, for example, your unsubscribe rate may increase. This can be an early warning sign to reduce the volume of communications you issue.
 - ✔ **Conversion Rate.** One of the most critical elements to track is how many recipients of your invitation or email take the action that you want them to take. For instance, how many people RSVP or complete their event registration in the immediate period after the send out? Research suggests that if you don't receive a response within 48-hours after an email is issued you are unlikely

to receive a reply at all unless you try a different method¹.

- ☑ **Industry Benchmarks.** Research indicates that emails in the event and entertainment niche have a 21.21% open rate on average and a 2.33% click-through rate². Other stats suggest email marketing campaigns within the event industry perform far worse at 9.38%, which puts the event industry in the lower results compared to other sectors³. Whatever the real stats, eventprofs need to work harder to get their email messages read by the people that matter.



1 Morin, A. Forbes. Waiting For a Reply? Study Explains The Psychology Behind Email Response Time. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/amymorin/2015/11/28/waiting-for-a-reply-study-explains-the-psychology-behind-email-response-time/#5088cha29755>

2 MailChimp. Email Marketing Benchmarks. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://MailChimp.com/resources/research/email-marketing-benchmarks/>

3 Chaffey, D. Email marketing engagement and response statistics 2018. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.smartinsights.com/email-marketing/email-communications-strategy/statistics-sources-for-email-marketing/>

GOOD DATA MANAGEMENT:

The Crux of a Successful Send Out

The importance of clean lists and good data management practices cannot be stressed enough. Your campaigns can only be as effective as your data is accurate. Any 'bad' emails can potentially jeopardize the delivery rate to other email addresses on the list. Even typos and missing names can limit the effectiveness of personalization, segmentation, and analysis.

Good data housekeeping for better email deliverability:

- ✔ Emails quickly go out of date. It is critical your guest database is clean, updated, and refreshed regularly.
- ✔ Analyze every email auto-responder message as these can often share when a contact has moved on to a new company or if the contact is away on extended leave.
- ✔ Regularly purge your lists. Identify those that haven't read your emails for some time and send them a break-up email. They can always opt back in if they want to hear from you again.
- ✔ Make sure that your data is GDPR compliant. This means having an active opt-in and being able to verify when a contact gave permission to be contacted, for what purpose(s) and for what time period.

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The importance of clean lists and good data management practices cannot be stressed enough.

TARGETED RSVP CAMPAIGNS:

Reaching Your Top Prospects

Keeping your database cleansed is vital but you also need to be able to segment your larger list effectively to focus properly on the right people. For different campaigns, you need to be able to precisely target your top prospects so they have the first chance of securing a place before places are filled by lower preference guests.

Work in order of priority to get the guest list you want:

- ✔ Use *Account Based Marketing* to focus your attention on signing up your most valuable leads.
- ✔ Prioritize a smaller number of contacts but use a more personalized approach and let them know how much you value their RSVP and attendance.
- ✔ Having full contact details in your database, such as a phone number, or PA details, will help to make the follow-up process easier and more effective. Avoid wasting time looking for missing information as the event date gets closer by having fully completed and checked data before the start of the campaign. Time put in at the early stages will really pay off here.



Work in order of priority to get the guest list you want.

EMAIL BEST PRACTICE:

Bolster Your Open Rates

There are no magic timescales for when your invitations should be issued to guarantee a sellout event but the better you get to know your audience, the more informed your decisions and timings will become. Many factors, such as your audience demographic, the type of event, timings and the formality of the occasion will influence the most effective time to share your invitations.

Tactics to get more eyeballs on your emails:

- ✔ Send your invitations out earlier in the week for more 'yes' responses. zkipster research shows that mailings issued Monday through to Thursday are likely to give the best results¹.
- ✔ The time of day that you send out can also have an impact. Work out the optimum time of day by testing campaigns with different mail out timings. Sending before 10 am in the relevant timezone could be a good approach, based on the assumption that most recipients will have cleared their inbox and has the rest of the day to notice and respond to it.

Many factors will influence the most effective time to share your invitations.

1 zkipster. 5 Data-proven Ways to Send More Successful Online Invitations. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.zkipster.com/blog/send-more-successful-online-invitations/>

- ✔ Perfect spelling and grammar. Any errors can be a big turn-off for your audience. Have more than one person proof and check the content. And, of course, always triple check the links.



SUBJECT LINES:

Tricks to Get your Event Emails Read

The subject line can be a huge deciding factor whether an email is even opened. Or not.

zkipster research didn't indicate any correlation between shorter subject lines and greater response rates, however, as people are reading emails increasingly from mobile devices it can be wise to keep them succinct so they can be viewed in full.

Different research analysis of 7 billion emails found that subject lines under 21 characters generated a 31% higher-than-average open rate, yet shorter subject lines account for less than 5% of all emails sent¹.

MailChimp research gave some interesting results. Perhaps surprisingly, the highest open rates of between 60-87%² mostly included the company name in the title with straightforward and honest subjects such as:

- ☐ [company name] NEWSLETTER
- ☐ INVITATION FROM [company name]
- ☐ UPCOMING EVENTS AT [company name]

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The subject line can be a huge deciding factor whether an email is even opened. Or not.

1 Clark, A. Less is More When it Comes to Email Subject Lines. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.charitydigitalnews.co.uk/2017/08/18/less-is-more-when-it-comes-to-email-subject-lines/>

2 MailChimp. Subject Line Comparison. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://MailChimp.com/resources/research/email-marketing-benchmarks/>

Ultimately for better open rates the subject needs to be honest, enticing and have a sense of urgency.

Other tactics to nail your subject line:

- ✔ Good practice is to A/B test two different subject lines on a small audience sample and then the text that performs the best can be rolled out in the emails to the remainder of the list. Then, going forward, it will be easier to hone effective subject lines that your audience responds to and eliminate approaches that are not getting results.
- ✔ Don't just personalize the email itself, use the recipient name in the subject box and let them know it is a personal event invitation, so they take greater notice. The same research study found that only 2% of all emails analyzed included personalization in the subject line, however, these emails generated 50% higher open rates than those without personalization. Impressive stats which make this definitely worth implementing!
- ✔ Get to the point to make the most of the subject line and share a clear benefit or call to action that inspires immediate action. Concise and direct is a good rule of thumb, give a clear hook, rather than making a statement. Most importantly, you must deliver what the subject line promises in the body of the email.
- ✔ zkipster research found that certain keywords in the subject increase opening rates. Indicating the kind of event (breakfast, lunch, dinner) seemed to increase opening rates. Interestingly,

mentioning the date in the subject also led to a high open rate of about 50%³.

- ☑ MailChimp analysis revealed that conveying a sense of urgency in the subject line ('urgent' or 'important') can increase the chance of getting read and using the word 'free' gave a small increase too. 'Announcements' and 'event invitations' are received much better than 'reminders'.
- ☑ Get playful and experiment with your subject line. Try using emojis and test to see whether small changes you make have an impact on open rates.



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3 zkipster. 5 Data-proven Ways to Send More Successful Online Invitations. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.zkipster.com/blog/send-more-successful-online-invitations/>

STAY OUT OF TROUBLE:

How To Avoid the Dreaded Spam Filters

Firewalls and spam filters can prevent your perfectly crafted invitation from even reaching your intended recipient. 21% of legitimate permission-based emails can also end up in the spam folder, according to information from ReturnPath¹.

Luckily, there are a few things you can do to avoid your emails being relegated to spam:

- ✔ Avoid using *certain words that are known to trigger spam filters*².
- ✔ Verify your email domain so that any emails that you send via an email marketing or invitation platform appear to have come directly from your inbox, rather than via an intermediary platform, for greater deliverability. The process varies between different providers but

There are a few things you can do to avoid your emails being relegated to spam.

1 Return Path. **Email Marketing Inbox Placement Dips Below 80% Globally**. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://returnpath.com/newsroom/email-marketing-inbox-placement-dips-80-globally/>

2 Prospect.io. **455 Spam Trigger Words to Avoid in 2018**. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://returnpath.com/newsroom/email-marketing-inbox-placement-dips-80-globally/>

your chosen software should be able to give step by step instructions to guide you through the process. It is a one-time setup but extremely important. Moreover, if you do not verify your email domain it can be actively harmful to your reputation and email campaigns.

- ✔ Request that recipients whitelist your email and add you to their address list. This is a way to verify your integrity and help your mail to pass through email defenses.
- ✔ In the footer of your emails offer a clear and easy way to opt-out of further communications. Not only is this good practice, it can also make you less likely to be reported as spam if people see a valid way to opt-out instead of reporting the email. It is preferable to be able to remove someone from your database at their request than to be marked as spam and have “warning flags” raised against your email domain.
- ✔ Go lightly with the images and links. Too many of either can be a signal to spam filters. Pictures can considerably slow down email loading time too, which might mean people click away before the email fully loads.

GETTING MORE RSVPS:

Ways to Nudge and Get a Response



Even if you have done everything right so far, there will always be a number of your invited guests who don't respond, for a multitude of reasons. This doesn't always mean that they are not interested in attending the event though, they might be busy, overloaded or have email fatigue. Often they will plan to return to your event invitation and respond, only to move onto other priorities.

This means that you should expect to give nudges through a variety of different touchpoints to remind them to respond or sign up. Research suggests that between 9 and 16 interactions may be needed with a brand on different channels, so you need to put the effort into the follow-up¹.

That translates into being ready in every channel relevant for your audience. Whether it is Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, email, website, live chat, phone or fax, you need to be there offering the same experience, branding, and voice.

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¹ Karla Straker Cara Wrigley Michael Rosemann, (2015), *"Typologies and touchpoints: designing multichannel digital strategies"*, Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing, Vol. 9 Iss 2 pp. 110 - 128

*Even if you have
done everything
right so far, there
will always be a
number of your
invited guests who
don't respond.*

If your invited guests are important to you don't give up on them, some of these ideas could work wonders:

- ✔ Don't give up on email after a single message. Try to contact the recipient by email again but instead of just sending a 'reminder' message try approaching them with a differently worded email to trigger a response or politely summarize your previous approach. A pushy, needy or aggressive approach will only send out the wrong messages and turn off the recipient².
- ✔ Send them an invitation or promotion about your event in the mail. Receiving something tangible through their letterbox can act as a solid reminder and convey the importance or formality of the occasion. Bonus points if you include a handwritten and personalized message. Sending something beautiful, quirky or notable may also encourage social sharing and discussion online which could prompt others in their network to respond.
- ✔ Pick up the phone to check directly with them that they received the invitation and whether they can make it. If you can't reach the prospect directly their PA may prove to be a useful ally to getting your event into their diary.
- ✔ Ramp up your social media marketing campaigns and content that you know is most likely to capture their attention.

2 Purbasari Horton, A. Fast Company. This Is How To Write A Follow-Up Email That's Not Annoying. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.fastcompany.com/40437743/this-is-how-to-write-a-follow-up-email-thats-not-annoying>

- ✔ Launch a remarketing campaign targeting those that have visited your website or have been invited to the event. Facebook and other social media channels can specifically target contacts to show them timely reminders.
- ✔ Drip feed some more tantalizing information about the event that you know will appeal to them, such as a new speaker announcement, performer or an exhibitor that will be launching a new product.
- ✔ Launch an experiential marketing campaign or activation. This doesn't have to be big budget, it could be small and localized and still have impact. The key is to think creatively and come up with ideas that will be attractive and reach those that you want to be there.
- ✔ Get influencers on board and talking about the event or sharing photos and plans about their own attendance.
- ✔ Publish blog posts focusing on topics that concern your audience and that will be covered in detail at the event. This can be a different way to get their attention and to realize the value of signing up right away.
- ✔ Host a webinar with one of the event speakers to introduce and interview them or do a short insight into their presentation.
- ✔ If you have a newsworthy hook, issue a press release. Local, national or industry





press coverage can still be very effective, particularly with specific demographics and the article will often be posted online as well as in print format.

To help determine the best strategy for your potential prospects refer back to *Securing Attendance: Your RSVP Tool Mix* for the questions to ask. Whatever methods you use for follow up and to get in front of your wishlist of attendees, it is important to measure the results so you are better informed for the future. Use tracking codes or tagged links or ask your attendees directly how they heard about the event. It may be a combination of touchpoints, rather than one single prompt, but it can be useful to determine the channels that resonated the most in terms of conversions.

RSVP AND DROP-OUT RATES:

What is “Normal”?

Even with great and well-crafted event invitations and touchpoints, zkipster warns that about 2 in 3 guests who said ‘yes’ might not show up¹. On average, around the globe, across every industry, for regular, non-seated events, the attendance rate of confirmed guests was about 30%.

Of course, the precise churn you can expect will vary depending on your event specifics, for instance, whether it is a free or paid event, the industry, the time of day, the importance of the occasion, how well you kept in touch with registered guests, how invested they are in the event and many other variables. The drop-off rate is also much lower with seated events, such as dinners, concerts, and performances. It is much better to be prepared and have a realistic vision of attendance numbers and estimated drop-off rate, rather than shocked and left with a mountain of uneaten food.

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1 zkipster. 5 Data-proven Ways to Send More Successful Online Invitations. Accessed May 2018 from: <https://www.zkipster.com/blog/send-more-successful-online-invitations/>



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*For regular,
non-seated
events, about 2 in
3 guests who said
“yes” won’t show
up.*

Minimize the impact no-shows have on your event:

- ✔ Always consider overbooking places to counteract those that inevitably won't turn up. Reduce the final catering numbers advised to the venue to counteract non-attendance and avoid wasted food and beverage.
- ✔ Choose a check-in system that can show in real-time how many people have arrived and how many are still to come. This can be important to advise the caterers or even to decide whether to delay the start of the event for five minutes to allow for latecomers.
- ✔ Don't let your venue lay out too many chairs in the plenary room for your conference. Encourage seating at the front of the room to be filled first to avoid unsightly gaps in the event photographs.

MANAGING EVENT CHECK-IN EFFECTIVELY:

Give a Warm Welcome

At the live event, the event check-in is often the first face-to-face interaction with the event. We all know how important first impressions are, and it is important to shine right from the start. A warm and efficient welcome can set the right tone for the whole event and put attendees in a good mood and receptive frame of mind.

Choose Tech Wisely for a Seamless Experience

Even for small events, using event technology can be a wise choice. For many event planners, they would never go back to traditional manual check-in methods once they realize the benefits of using guest list management technology and check-in tools.

How tech can make the difference:

- ✔ Banish clipboards, pens, and paper and allocate tablets to check-in staff. Text search on a check-in app and tablet device can be a much quicker process than scrolling through an alphabetical list and it means no additional work after the event typing up paperwork.

We all know how important first impressions are, and it is important to shine right from the start.

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- ✔ As well as efficient tech, having well briefed and fully trained registration staff are essential to a personal and friendly welcome. Your event registration team can be responsive and reactive at peak arrival times too by opening extra checkout lanes or mobilizing more staff with tablet devices at the entrance.
 - ✔ Self-check-in, kiosk systems can help to ease the pressure for large events with very pressurized registration periods. Some guests may prefer to check themselves in rather than stay in line. Other guests will always favor the human interaction.
 - ✔ WiFi connectivity can fail so make sure any tech works offline on all devices and syncs all the data again when it reconnects.
 - ✔ Print name badges on demand to ensure there is no wastage. This also saves space laying out countless pre-printed badges and is better to hide contact data or the number of people that haven't turned up. Printing a badge at check-in can take a matter of seconds and be much faster than searching for a name badge on a desk.

EFFECTIVE GUEST MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES:

Little Touches that Make the Difference



You want to continue the personalized communications you have been cultivating with your guests ahead of the live event to really make an impression and make them feel valued when they arrive at the venue. Little touches can be appreciated.

Use technology for a more personal touch:

- ✔ Having pictures available against each attendee profile is good from a security and guestlist checking perspective. It may also give the opportunity to greet someone by name, without having to ask them any questions. This is a definite opportunity to impress your guests with your attention to detail!
- ✔ Some check-in systems trigger a notification by text message, email or push notification when a VIP or speaker has arrived. Without requiring any intervention by the check-in staff the event manager and AV team can

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Little touches can be appreciated.

be on standby ready to receive the new arrival at exactly the right moment.

- ✔ For walk-ups and plus ones, working with a tablet device enables quick recording of any information you need. You can hand the device over to be completed comfortably and get them into the event faster. Plus no typing up handwritten registration forms afterward.
- ✔ Registration staff can share information such as table numbers or special instructions, such as the location a guest needs to head to first, by passing on any information recorded in the notes section.



CONCLUSION

Crafting a personalized way to communicate with your invitees is the best chance to convert positive RSVPs.

Research indicates that looking through your data, optimizing your database and mixing outreach tools gives the best results to maximize event attendance.

In an incredibly noisy and information-rich world, the thirst for relevant, personal and valuable communication is still there. If your message is well-crafted and your event is relevant for your prospective attendees, don't shy away from letting them know.

A NOTE FROM ZKIPSTER

Commitment is pure gold in today's world. Flaky guests are costly. That's why smart event professionals use tools that help keep guests engaged from the Save the Date to event day.

At zkipster, we are extremely excited to share this resource with you. It is a true art to get amazing guests to say "Yes!" over and over again. The expert advice in this guide for developing strategies, using tactics, and building a strong RSVP campaign are among the most important steps you can take to mastering the art of "yes".

Julius Solaris and the Event Manager Blog team have done an amazing job of bringing this from a shared idea to a real guide in your event planning toolkit. I hope you enjoy it as much as we do, and that you share it with others who work hard every day to create the perfect event experience.

David Becker

CEO and Co-Founder, zkipster

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Julius Solaris is the editor of *Event Manager Blog*. Started in 2007, EventMB is the number one blog worldwide for event professionals. He is the founder of the *Event Innovation Lab*, an immersive training program for Fortune 500 companies and high growth event teams.

He has been named one of the 25 most influential individuals in the Meeting Industry.

He is the author of over 10 books on event technology and innovation (The Eventtech Bible, Meeting Design, The Future of Event Marketing, The Art of Venue Negotiation, the annual Event Trends Report, Social Media for Events, The Event App Bible, The Good Event Registration Guide, Engaging Events and The Venue of the Future).



Becki Cross set up UK based event management company and SME, Events Northern Ltd, in 2004. Becki has organized events ranging from conferences to exhibitions, festivals to awards ceremonies, fashion shows to golf tournaments and everything in between. Organizing conferences and corporate events are Becki's passion and she believes that conferences should never be boring!

Becki is the Deputy Editor of EventMB, which she describes as her dream job alongside event planning!

Follow Becki on Twitter: [@beckitrain](https://twitter.com/beckitrain).



Event Manager Blog is the most influential website in the meeting and event industry. It offers education, innovation, and inspiration through regular articles and industry reports.

Founded in 2007, EventMB has been widely referenced as the go-to resource for innovative event professionals wanting to learn more about trends in the event planning industry.

EventMB releases industry reports and intelligence about event technology, social media, and engagement at events.

Thousands of event professionals have downloaded EventMB free reports at [*eventmanagerblog.com*](http://eventmanagerblog.com).

ZKIPSTER

Trusted by event professionals worldwide, [*zkipster*](#) helps the best invitation-only events happen. From custom online invitations and guest lists to fast, reliable, and secure guest check-in, zkipster is used regularly by global brands and organizations in more than 100 countries at galas, premieres, fundraisers, product launches, conferences, and corporate events.

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DISCLAIMER

While this report has been sponsored the analysis is completely unbiased.

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