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Expansion Mode

Helping Professional Service Firms Build Their Business

Tap into the *Marketing Magic* of Special Events

By Paula Carlson

MOMENTUM!



Marketing in the financial and professional services arena boils down to three basic goals—retaining your current clients, finding new clients, and finding bigger and better clients.

Event marketing, done right, is a very effective way of accomplishing all three. In fact, special events can serve many other purposes beyond basic prospecting:

- **Decreases time to convert prospects to clients**
- **Converts electronic marketing and social media leads to appointments and sales**
- **Can be used as a forum for announcing rebranding, mergers, or new services**
- **Provides educational opportunities on key new topics ahead of the competition**
- **Offers crisis management in adverse times**
- **Facilitates team building and recruiting**

Beyond Dinners

Using special events to prospect for clients has long been a staple of financial and professional services providers. But the rubber chicken circuit is not what it used to be.

Using prospect lists and event marketing services to recruit prospects lost its luster long ago.

Because of the barrage of prospecting dinner requests affluent individuals receive, invitations are typically tossed, unopened, into the trash along with the rest of the junk mail.

What's worse, many of the "prospects" who do show up for these affairs are event circuit junkies who are more than happy to sit through your presentation in exchange for a free dinner—but very unlikely to ever become a client. *(Continued)*



How to Pack the House

By Gene Walden

InvestmentWritingServices.com



A special event is a great way to reward your clients and make new friends, but how do you fill a room?

Where do you turn to find good prospects to invite to your special events? To steal a line from *A Field of Dreams*, "build it and they will come."

Having a special event—or a series of compelling events—on the calendar invokes a sense of urgency and mission. It gives you a reason to expand your circle, meet more people and make more contacts to invite to your events. And it gives you a great reason to reach out to that list of contacts you've already made. *(Continued)*

Tapping into Special Events (Continued)

But that doesn't mean special events can't be a prospecting gold mine if you can think outside the rubber chicken circuit. With the right approach, special events can be a potent tool for prospecting, client retention and many other vital marketing objectives.



Not only must you be a little more creative than a simple sit-down dinner, you also need to be willing to invest the time and resources into executing your event marketing plan seamlessly from start to finish in order to get the most from your special events.

With a comprehensive approach, event marketing will allow you to close more leads—and do it faster and more efficiently than any other marketing tool you could use.

If Not Dinner, What?

First rule: Make it fun. Give people a reason to want to come. Meet at a winery, a bakery, a brewery, a flower garden, a museum, or a historic mansion. Bring a musician or a magician or a comedian or a speaker on a topic that may have nothing to do with your business. Or invite them to golf lessons or a pool tournament or a dinner aboard a boat.

You want to give your clients an event to enjoy—and a good hook to invite their friends. A fun, casual event also gives you the opportunity to mingle with your clients and guests, press the flesh, thank them in person for showing up, and give everyone a memorable experience.

With the proper prep work, a fun, compelling event, and a timely, systematic follow-up process, your event marketing campaign will provide an endless flow of new and better clients your firm.

About the Author: As a specialist in strategic planning and marketing, [Paula Carlson](#) has conducted hundreds of special events over the past two decades to help professional and financial services companies attract and retain thousands of clients. She is the president of **Momentum**, a Minneapolis-based events marketing firm. (www.momentumtest.com).

Pack the House (Continued)

The Low Hanging Fruit

The best place to start, of course is to seek referrals from your current clients.

The best hosting clients are:

- **Those who have provided referrals in the past or had been referred to you by other clients,**
- **Those who had attended your events in the past or had given you referrals in the past (or talked about it), and**
- **Those who you know would have a special interest in attending the type of event you are sponsoring.**

But where else can you find prospects for your invitation list? There's a term for it:

It's called "beating the bushes." Here are few ways you can do that to find a growing list prospects for you invitation list:

Stay active

Think of all of the places where you can meet new friends. That may mean joining some organizations, such as your local alumni club, a business group, a social group, one or more meet-up groups, or religious institution. The more networking meetings you attend the more people you can add to your prospects list.

Take a Professional to Breakfast

Try to hook up with professionals in other specialties to build strategic alliances. For instance, if you're a financial advisor, try to form alliances with accountants, attorneys, mortgage brokers, architects, and other professional service providers. The relationship can work both ways, you may refer clients to them for their specific services and they may do the same in return.

When you have a special event, invite these other professionals to your event and suggest that they bring a guest or two. The more your professional alliances see of you and your organization, the more likely they will be to send you referrals.

(Continued)

Pack the House (Continued)

Teach a Class

Are there community education programs in your area? You could put together a course on your areas of specialization to offer for free at one or more of these educational venues. If the obvious educational institutions can't accommodate you, look for other possibilities. Community centers, senior centers, places of worship, and libraries may all welcome an expert like you, who could offer a free course for their patrons. Teaching classes may not have an immediate impact on your business, but it gives you a chance to become involved in the community, share your expertise, and build your prospect list for future events.

Volunteer to Speak

Again, there are many organizations that are constantly looking for speakers for their monthly meetings. Associations, trade groups, business groups, community centers, places of worship, senior centers, libraries and other organizations are all good candidates. If you can do a good job of enlightening individuals on important areas of their finances or their personal or professional life, you'll find plenty of opportunities to speak. And with each new speaking opportunity comes the chance to meet more prospects to add to your event invitation list.

When you have a chance to speak, remember the message isn't about you or your business. The audience is there for real information and real answers. Stick to the topic. Enlighten, entertain and invite questions and interaction



Tap into Social Media

Cyber space is full of possibilities. Professional services sites like LinkedIn can help prospects find you, learn about your services, and connect to your web site. In fact, LinkedIn and Facebook are a great way to connect with friends, relatives and past associates. It's an automatic networking system.

Your growing network of acquaintances can be a potent prospecting tool. You may not want to use a hard sell technique to recruit colleagues at the social media sites, but when you have an upcoming event that seems ideal for certain people your social media realm, that's the perfect time to send them an invite and strengthen your relationship with them.

Use the Right Leads Program

Most established professionals shun marketing event lead lists—and with good reason. They tend to attract the free-dinner-junkies who have no interest in becoming clients.

But there are actually some decent, targeted lead program—a good lead program can uncover some prospects who you might want to invite to future events once you've established a relationship with them.

Once you get in the flow of gathering prospects, the process becomes automatic. It's all in the mindset. With a calendar of upcoming marketing events on your schedule, you'll be more motivated to stay active and beat the bushes for more good prospects to add to your list.

About the Author. [Gene Walden](#) has helped dozens of professional and financial services firms with web content, marketing material, newsletters, financial reports, blogs and even books. He is a best-selling author, columnist and contributor to many publications, such as *The Wall Street Journal* and *Investors' Business Daily*. He is executive director of www.InvestmentWritingServices.com.
(gwalden100@comcast.net)

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