

A System For Successful Event Promotion

with Justin Trapp

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Hey everyone, Justin Trapp here, so delighted to be with you today for another Ministry Library Leadership Training, and today, we're going to be talking about an event marketing blueprint. It's a system that I created that I've seen work at youth groups, large churches, small churches, even businesses use this to launch new products. It's a very easy-to-follow system. A volunteer could do it, you could do it, your staff could do it.

It doesn't require any money, it just requires some intentionality, and you just follow the plan. It's predictable. If you follow the plan, it will help your church have more people show up for your big day, or your big event, or a new sermon series. Let's dive right in.

Now, have you ever poured a bunch of focus, energy, and resources into an event or a series, and when the day came for that series or that big event to arrive, you didn't have really the numbers or the attendance that you thought you would get?

There could be a multitude of reasons why that happens, but I'm going to share with you today how to avoid that, so that when you do have an event, when you do pour a lot of money, time, focus, that when event day comes, or launch day comes, or whatever it is, that you have such momentum, there's a buzz in the air, people are excited about this. I'm going to show you how to do that today.

Now, before I get into that, let me just say that I'm going to be talking a lot about how you can double your attendance for an event, or how you can double last year's Easter attendance. And this isn't just about numbers for us. You see, well-attended services or well-attended events are a snapshot of what could be and should be all the time at your church. Let me dive in quickly.

Now, here's the issue that we see with large events, and man, I've been guilty of this myself. I get really excited about a big event for instance, like an Easter Sunday. And I get up three, four weeks, five weeks before Easter Sunday, and I say, "Hey, guess what? Easter Sunday is gonna be ... You know, we're a month away. We're gonna go to two services. It's gonna be the biggest Sunday we've ever had.



THEBIGIDEA

When we give away too many details about an upcoming event, we are left to repeat everything we said which actually hurts momentum. This system helps you slowly release info and build momentum.

actionsteps

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We're gonna have an Easter egg hunt, we're gonna have the Easter Bunny, we're gonna have free candy, we're gonna have petting zoo for the kids, and not to mention, we're gonna start a brand new series, it's gonna be incredible. It's gonna be the greatest day we've ever had here at our church. Make sure you invite somebody."

Well, all those things are true, right? All those things are true, and all those things are good, but what you've done is you've left nothing for the imagination. Nothing is left to sort of mark it out or communicate in a layered format. There's nothing left to say. You just sort of vomited it all out, and so what happens is I say all those things and then three weeks out, what do we do? We get up and we say those same exact things again. This event marketing blueprint is really going to help you layer these little nuggets, these little bits of info, that really helps make people curious.

What I like to do is I like to call that and refer to that as "vomit marketing," and vomit marketing obviously is not good. As it says in Proverbs, you know, "the dog returns to his vomit," a lot of times as churches, we return to that same scenario where we get really excited about marketing something, we get really excited about a big event, and so we sort of give all the spoilers, if you will, too early. What this system is going to do is it's going to help you to make people curious, make them lean in, and make them want to know more, make them ask you questions that ... Because they're curious.

Let's dive right in. Now, let me say this. Vomit marketing is the quickest way to kill momentum. Now, when we learn the opposite of vomit marketing, we can actually learn a lot from Hollywood. Hollywood has ... You know, it's a billion-dollar, multi-billion-dollar industry, and we see blockbuster movies come and go, and we can learn a lot from some of those marketing principles. Right now, I'm recording this, we're getting ready to head into the summer, where we're going to see Justice League is a popular DC comic book — you know, Superman, Batman — they're coming out with this blockbuster.

But let's start, though, at the beginning, though, of this DC universe, right? So, Man of Steel was the first entry into this universe, and I want to show you the first trailer. So there you are, a year out from Man of Steel's release date, and I'm going to show you the very first teaser trailer that they produced for Man of Steel, and I want you to notice what they do say and what they don't say. So check it out, it's real short, but let me just show you real quick, and then we'll have a little learning moment on the back side.

Now, did you notice anything? It was very much a desaturated look, it was sort of a slow-brewing music. Clark, they don't really show his face a whole lot, they show a little boy running with a cape, they don't show Superman in his suit, there's no action. And then the narrator speaks of things to come, what Clark Kent would become, what he would represent, and alludes to this sort of future opportunity or future ... It peeks into the future, if you will. And so this trailer really made everyone just sort of get a grasp or get a glimpse into what is coming with this new Man of Steel movie.

Now, let me show you the last trailer, the trailer that they displayed the week before the movie came out. Check this out, it's 30 seconds. Here you go.

Now, did you notice, there was ... The music was dynamic, it was loud, it was fast-paced, you've got explosions, you've got fighting, you have humor, you have everything. I mean, it's just "bam, bam, bam, bam," non-stop, for 30 seconds. Imagine if Warner Brothers and DC would have taken this trailer and played it a year out before the movie came out, right? Once you see this trailer, there's no curiosity left. You've seen all the highlights of the movie, the best moments, or the most dynamic, climactic moment.

And so what we can learn from Hollywood is that we don't have to give the 30-second spoiler trailer early on in our event promotion; we can take a more subdued approach, a more layered approach, and that's going to really, really help our marketing.

So let me just dive right in and I'm going to show you and tell you exactly what to do and exactly how to say it. So, five weeks out for your big event, here's a tip: Be general and as vague as possible, with the promise of sharing more info in the future.

So, no dates, no details. Here's what you could do. You could do one stage announcement, and you can mention from the stage, if you're the pastor, or you can have the pastor mention from the stage right before their message. You can say something like, "Hey, next week ... We have something really exciting coming here in the future of our church, and next week, I'm gonna be sharing with you a little bit about it, and I can't tell you today, but make sure you come next week. I'll tell you right before the message next week, this big announcement that we have."

What you've done is you've created curiosity about this big event or this thing that's coming. You've actually secured half the people in the room to come back to hear the message next Sunday, because they want to know. And so what you can also do is you can send one email about something very exciting to share in the future.

This email could be something from the pastor, perhaps, or if the pastor has a blog, you could do something as well. It's more like a footnote, it's more like a "PS" in an email. Maybe the pastor sends out a devotional, or the church sends out a devotional or announcement, and then "PS: This next week." So if you make the stage announcement on Sunday, you send out an email on Monday or Tuesday about "This coming Sunday, we're gonna share the big announcement, and make sure you are there."

Facebook and Instagram, or social media in general, you can mention something very exciting. So remember, your stage and your email and all your marketing channels need to sort of mirror, and be the same voice, and sort of subdued tone. The details that you share on the stage should be the same that you do on Instagram, so for an Instagram post or Facebook, you could say, "I have something very exciting to share with you, can't wait." Maybe if you have a logo for the event, you blur it out, whatever the case may be.

Four weeks out. Four weeks out, you're going to announce from the stage. You announce, for instance, like your big Christmas production or big Christmas services, announce the official Christmas services with the logo and the service's date, but promise more details next week. That's what you do from the stage. With an email, you can make the big announcement, official announcement announcing Christmas service times, or whatever the case may be, with the logo, the service dates, and promise more details next week.

You see what we're doing? We're always promising something more. We're always alluding to, like, "There's more to this." There's more to this than meets the eye. If you watch Jimmy Fallon or Stephen Colbert or James Corden, late-night, they're always promoting the next night. They're always saying, "Hey, this week we have a great lineup of shows. Monday we're gonna have this, and we have a special game," or "We have a special guest on Tuesday, I'll tell you more about that tomorrow night." You'll see that they're always sort of layering it out.

So, Facebook and Instagram, very similar to your stage announcement. You're going to use an iPhone video to announce this. You can just post an image of the logo with what you said in the stage announcement, and that's one for five weeks out, one stage announcement for four weeks out.

Now, here's the deal. Three weeks out, you're going to do two stage announcements, and this must be from two different people. So here's where you can introduce your first promo video, and you can also add one more thing that you haven't shared before.

So let's say for Christmas, you've announced the official dates, you've announced a big production, perhaps — maybe your church does that — and then this third week, third week out, you share the video, and you also share something, for instance, like "We're going to be having" "free pictures with Santa Claus." I know that probably doesn't bother most people, but ... "Free pictures with Santa Claus, bring your family, friends, invite your neighbors. We're gonna have free pictures with Santa Claus. We have a whole set piece, and you can take pictures with your camera, or you can get pictures from our camera."

That's a nice little layer to this marketing campaign that you hadn't shared yet, there's more things to share next week. But when you do two stage announcements, make sure it's from two different people. You can do your promo video as one sort of stage announcement, and then the second. Same thing here with your emails and Facebook posts. You can email out the video.

Obviously, you want to post it on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, you can do all those things. But remember, you're mirroring what you say on the stage on social media and on your emails. And email is a powerful thing. I don't think a lot of churches utilize emails the way that they could, and so make sure that you're also sending out emails as well. They're incredibly powerful.

Now, as we go from three weeks to two weeks, here's where we transition your message from information to action. As we get to two weeks out, we're going to make sure that all of our stage announcements or social media is more about calling people to action.

It's getting them to share, it's getting them to comment, it's getting them to like, it's getting them to invite, that's going to be key here. The first three weeks is information, information, information, layering out, providing new details. Two weeks out is all about providing your people with tangible ways to invite their friends.

Here's a tip. You can provide your people with promo materials, so give them images, links, videos to share, pre-written posts or tweets or emails. People love what's done for them, right? So you can tell them, "Hey, invite your friends," but if you say, "Hey, here's five example posts for you to post on your Facebook," they're just going to copy and paste it. Just makes it so much more easy for them to do, and they will do it.

Now, two weeks out, you're going to do three social media posts in each channel. You're going to post a graphics for people to use on their profiles, you're going to post the video, you're going to post anything new that you're going to share from the stage as well. Make sure that you do that.

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Two stage announcements. For two weeks out, you're going to need two stage announcements. Use two different people, and then specifically ask the congregation. Say, "Hey, we've made these resources available to you," at here, or maybe you set up a domain, or on our Facebook page. Ask them to post. "Hey, we'd love for you to post, and we'd love for you to share. This is gonna be a phenomenal event.

We've been talking about this event for weeks now, and we think not only are you going to love it, but your neighbors and your friends are going to love it. Like we mentioned last week, we have Santa Claus, pictures with Santa Claus. We didn't tell you that we're also gonna be having some snow, a snow machine, and that's gonna be a lot of fun, so your kids can take pictures in the snow, they can play in some snow."

And so every time they hear about this event, they are learning something new, and people love new. When you get repetitive people don't connect as well. When it becomes predictable, there's less connectivity, and so if you're always sharing something new, it keeps them on the edge, it keeps them engaged, it keeps them curious.

So, two stage announcements, use two different people two weeks out. If you wanted to update your promo video, you could use faster-tempo music or more upbeat-tempo music than the week before, and that sort of helps go along with what you've been doing.

Two weeks out, you're going to email your church, asking them again, right? Just like you did on the stage, to post, share, tag their friends on Facebook, the various social media platforms, and then ask them to personally invite their neighbors and people in their community. It's going to be a great time for them to invite.

And then one week out. One week out is like the 30-second Superman Man of Steel trailer, right? It's fast, furious. So you're going to do three stage announcements, so the Sunday before the event, you're going to do three stage announcements. I know you're thinking, "Justin, that's a lot." Here's the deal. Use multiple people.

You can use a funny guy; a pastor can do it, so the pastor can come from a spiritual perspective' you could have humor up there with a guy just once; or a couple could talk about just candy, or giving out Easter candy, if it's an Easter event, whatever. You can use all the different layers or the different dynamics that your church has, the different people that are talented in their own way, to promote this event. It doesn't always have to be through a spiritual lens or a humor lens. Use all of the different senses, or the different elements at your disposal. Play the final promo video, make sure it's got upbeat, driving music.

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And then the last thing said from your stage the week before, the last thing needs to be "Next week, don't forget." That needs to be the last thing they hear when they leave your auditorium, so that the last thing in their mind when they leave church is "next week." So, one week out, you're going to do ... Every day, you're going to post on Facebook, you're going to post on Instagram, you're going to post on Twitter. You can post countdown images, so "six days away," post graphics for people to share.

Engage with your audience with questions, too. So if you're at Christmas time you don't want to be just posting, like, "Hey, come to our event, come to our event, come to our event," but also, if it's Christmas time, you could say ... You could ask questions that are engaging questions, like "What is your favorite Christmas drink?" "What is your favorite Christmas movie?" "What is your favorite Christmas memory?" And get people talking about it. It's a lot of fun, and it only serves what you're trying to do, as far as your marketing goes. It only helps and encourages and nurtures that for you.

Now, remember, when you're asking questions on Facebook, or social media, in general, don't ask why or how, right? People love ... They'll tell you, "What is your favorite Christmas memory?" "Where does your family go?" So you can do what and where or who. "Who is your favorite Christmas character?"

But if you ask them, "Why is Christmas special to you?" that just takes a longer response, and I mean, we're, like, a lazy generation, right? We want what's done for us, so they're not going to answer why or how, for the most part, so make sure you remember that.

And then for your emails, you need to send out three emails that week. Send out an email the Monday, send out an email, like, the Wednesday, and then send out an email that Friday, promoting that. And it can be ... It doesn't have to be the same email. It can be similar, though, because remember, you're going to send out an email to a hundred people. If you send out a hundred people, on a great day, 30 people will open that email.

So just because you're sending it out three times doesn't mean everyone's seeing it. Maybe it's going to their spam, maybe they're just so busy they haven't even checked their email, or it's in their Promotion tab. Whatever the case may be, send out three emails. You'll be glad you did.

Eventually, what your marketing looks like is this funnel. Effective marketing really sort of layers out, and builds and builds and builds, and you're adding new layers, and new things, and new bits of information,

and new fun things in your marketing as you get closer to the event, so that when you finally get to the week of, it's fast, furious ... Like that trailer, you're sort of just firing on all cylinders, and you're doing a great job.

Now, here's the thing to remember. What I like to think about event marketing is that event marketing, you can take this planning, sort of condense it if you need to, or make it your own, but this plan works, four to six weeks out.

You need four to six weeks for a big event, in my opinion. You could even do eight if it's, like, the biggest event of the year. Not Easter, Christmas, because people sort of know those are coming, right? So if you're going to do a big financial campaign, or you're launching a new building, whatever, you can do eight weeks.

But I recommend four to six is really all the time that you need, and that's for an event. Think of it like a 747. It's got to have a long runway, it's a big, big machine, it's this big bird that's got to take off. For a sermon series, if you're going to do a sermon series promotion, you really need to condense this into more like two and a half weeks.

Think of it like an F-16 on an aircraft carrier. You've got to get up, get going, and get ... You know, with speed and velocity. You don't want to promote a sermon series for two months. Pastors, we care about sermon series, but I don't know if our people care about sermon series for eight weeks straight. If your sermon series is tied to an event, that's different, but I think events and series can be two different marketing animals, so make sure you condense the blueprint appropriately for what you're doing.

So that is the event marketing blueprint. I hope that this has helped. I hope this has been beneficial. You can find me on Twitter at @justintrapp and I love to connect with you. Now, I've seen youth groups use this, I've seen large churches, small churches, businesses, and they've all said the same thing. People emailing back say, "Hey, Justin, it sounded so simple, but I followed it, I did exactly what you said on the training, and it worked."

And I've had people email me saying, "We doubled our attendance in one night," "We doubled our attendance on one Sunday." I had even one church say, "We tripled our attendance for this big event that we did on this weekend." And so I hope this helps. Love to connect with you, reach out to me, @justintrapp and love to chat and see what God's doing in your church and in your community. Thanks.