



Celebrity events—an ideal fund-raising strategy **One firm's 'know-how' helps non-profits raise big revenues**

Is your organization looking for new fundraising strategies? Are you having trouble getting staff volunteers, board members, and above all, sponsors enthused about your projects? Tired of the same old approaches and “ho-hum” functions?

Want an event with built-in glamour, a proven track record of success, and most importantly, the potential for huge revenues?

If the answer to these questions is “yes,” you might consider having a Celebrity Event.

Whether a breakfast, dinner, or a formal “concert” such functions offer excellent opportunities for non-profits to realize their fundraising potential. When properly planned and executed, these programs can produce significant revenues. In the process, they can energize an organization and breath new life into its volunteer and donor base while creating excitement within the larger community, including the much needed media sector.

Successful celebrity events are the culmination of months of activity on the part of many people. They are intended to be fun, entertaining, and of course, profitable, but even if “sold out,” the real revenue is rarely realized by actual ticket sales. Rather, it is generated through multiple ancillary fundraising elements that are skillfully and carefully woven into the overall project during the weeks and months leading up to the “big day.”

A leader in the design and management of celebrity events and related fundraising strategies is Entertainment Consultants, of Baltimore Maryland. The award winning firm services non-profit organization throughout the nation and has produced numerous events overseas during its 25 year history.

According to company officials, the most financially successful celebrity events involve a great deal more than producing an entertaining “on stage” program. “We enjoy creating outstanding shows and we love all those standing ovations,” says vice-president, Art Wachter, “but the real purpose is to make money—preferably lots of it—for the organization.”

Besides putting professional expertise into the actual programs themselves, Wachter says, his team devotes equal amounts of design and production creativity into developing ancillary revenue generating initiatives as part of the overall project. “Our productions are state-of-the-art.” Wachter says, “but so is our fundraising expertise. We show our clients how to use the project to generate revenue well beyond simple ticket sales.” In the process, he says, the firm helps organizations broaden their donor, sponsor, volunteer, and rank and file membership bases—all of it aimed at increasing revenue.

Before signing on to a project, Wachter and his design staff insist on meeting with the organization’s board, executive director, and key chairpersons to gage the level of interest and commitment. After determining these, with full cooperation and board oversight, the firm custom-designs the project from start to finish, usually including a myriad of ancillary fundraising initiatives all tied thematically to the event, which itself is designed around a central theme. Months ahead of the “big day, committees are created and assigned specific responsibilities, goals, and deadlines. Wachter serves as the overall producer or as he refers to it, “quarterback” in managing the entire project. He sits on every committee and constantly monitors the interaction between them, making certain all elements are operating in tandem.

Early in the process, Entertainment Consultants' production team sets about the task of identifying potential headline talent, negotiating artist and supplier contracts, designing the program, securing the venue, and otherwise overseeing all elements of the function, including legal, insurance, technical, and artistic matters. The process can be highly technical and complex, and requires skill, professional expertise, and often an intricate working knowledge of "the business" —all of which, says Wachter, Entertainment Consultants "posses in abundance and puts to work for its clients."

Over the years, the firm has produced programs featuring a full array of famous personalities, from huge arena concerts featuring stars like The Tonight Show's Jay Leno to celebrity breakfasts hosted by superstar legends, like baseball's Cal Ripken.

According to Wachter, such programs are "perfectly suited" for non-profit organizations and they produce goodwill and positive exposure throughout the community, benefiting the organization and its mission.

Entertainment Consultants' creative director, Denise Dotterweich, says this "turn-key" approach to producing events of such magnitude has numerous benefits. "A complex project like this has many pieces, and many participants," she says. "We provide a level of professionalism and expertise that extends throughout the entire network and ties everything and everyone together from beginning to end." She says the company usually calls one or more post-event meetings to evaluate and critique the project from multiple angles.

Wachter says the question he always loves to answer at such meetings is: "Besides having all that fun, how much money did we make for organization?"

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