

HOW TO:

# LAUNCH AN EVENT

TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS



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# Table of Contents:

- 1** Introduction
- 2** Expenses
- 3** Finding Sponsors
- 4** Finding Attendees
- 5** Event Logistics
- 6** After Event Sponsors

# How To: Launch an Event to Grow Your Business

## Chapter One

### Event Creation: Who, What, When, and Where

Awesome! You've decided that you want to organize an event. As someone who has organized dozens of events over the past two years, I can personally attest to how events can help you grow personally and help grow a community.

**Events don't have to be a money loss for you and your company.**

Whatever your event is, know that it can help you create a brand around your company, help find leads, and ultimately educate you and your attendees on a topic/topics of your choice. When you educate your customers you become their resource and they will come back to you time and time again to be educated. This is very important in the sales process.

If you haven't already, be sure to know what your event is and who you think will be your target audience. Once you have that squared away you can start preparing for the actual event itself. You can do this by thinking about your end results and moving backwards. As for the type of attendees you want to attend, ask yourself, where do they work, how can you find them, and how can you get them to your event.

If you have a team working with you, which I recommend, it is vital that everyone is on the same page with a consistent message.

**Example.** Start Norfolk is a weekend long startup competition, that combines entrepreneurs, developers and designers to validate and build a startup.

Your marketing material (Facebook, Twitter, website, etc) must have the same unified definition. A shared Google document with all the event information will work for your team or you can use a project management tool to store all your data. Make sure everyone knows what to say. Have a written template to make sure the message is consistent.

Before you tell anyone about your event you must make sure that the event is easy to understand. Don't just throw around buzzwords and think that will work. You are looking to be thorough and easily identifiable.

**Bad Example:** Drop Anchor is a two day conference on Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Startup Community Building in Norfolk, VA.

**Good Example:** Drop Anchor is about growing and developing yourself, company, community and inner awesome in Norfolk, VA on April 18-19.

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The name of your event is important. Make it memorable and when you can add words to the event that can describe what your event is, do so. This will help with search engine optimization as well. This was easy with Start Norfolk, since startups were basically in the title. It was not easy to educate folks on what it was.

Is it a tech only competition, do I have to be technical, what if someone will steal my idea. These are all questions that have come up during each of the three Start Norfolk events. When you run into questions that keep coming up, it may be time to start a FAQ page, don't worry about it until you start getting receive the same questions.

With Drop Anchor, the name was narrowed down to Drop or Iron Anchor and a Twitter contest found the winner. Days later, many let me know about some of the bad definitions Drop Anchor had, yet I decided to keep the name. Many thought it was a great name.

On every piece of marketing material make sure folks know when and where the event is and how they can find out more information. **Consistency.**

## Chapter Two

### Expenses

Back in November 2011, I held Start Norfolk, a weekend long startup competition along with a one track speaker lineup running parallel. This was the first large scale (>100 person) event I had ever organized and I really had no idea what to expect. For months leading up to Start Norfolk, I had hosted dozens of mini-meetups (<50 people) to help promote the bigger paid event. I found it important to produce many smaller events to prepare me for what ended up being a 175 person, 3 day event. I was not prepared during the first Start Norfolk for all of the expenses that occurred (people ate way more than expected) and found myself asking folks for more beer money and if they would sponsor food on the final day.

#### **Two key takeaways were:**

- 1) know your numbers, cut ticket sales off a week early if you can. This will allow you to get a good handle on food numbers, which typically will be one of your top two ticket costs.
- 2) Everything costs more than you expect it to, don't forget about tax too. Before you decide to organize an event, beware of hidden costs that will spring up throughout the process.

Looking back at all the events I've organized I saw a trend in **expenses**. They are high and writing big check sucks! The highest tended to be food (tip and delivery included?), Speaker Costs and Venue. If your event has cash prizes make sure you can pay off your prizes and event expenses. Along with each of these are several things most don't think about on a first look. If you don't know what to expect or the venue doesn't notify, you could end up with thousands of extra costs you didn't expect.

Cleanup (paper products, bleach, cleaning person, etc), audio/visual, parking, hotels, advertising, transportation, website needs (learn Wordpress and buy a template or allow a local design shop to create it and give them a sponsorship in return), t-shirts, lanyards, flyers, posters, banners, tables and chairs. A lot more than you thought, huh? The best way I have seen that will offset expenses is sponsors. Without sponsors your ticket prices will likely be too large and your total expected will shrink.

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Get your first sponsor today and I'll also send you a 1 week email course on how to get bigger and better sponsors.

Once you have figured out what expenses you think you will have, make sure you really can accommodate the amount of people you want to have. If you want 100 people at your event, expect 50. I wanted 500 to come to Start Norfolk initially and until I talked to Matt Smith of Insightpool in Atlanta, I had no reason to think that 500 was unreasonable. If you launched a product tomorrow could you get 500 paid users? Take the total amount of money needed for the event and add 25%. Once you have that number, divide it by the amount of people you want at the event. That should be the bare minimum for your ticket price. You can offer an early bird price or discounts for group sales, but make sure you know the amount needed to break even.

After seeing all that can go into an event, I encourage anyone who may want to organize a large event to try out a few smaller ones first. This way you will understand the ins and outs at a smaller capacity. 90% of every event is prep work before the event actually occurs. The last thing you want is to not be ready, physically and monetarily for your event to be a success.

When jumping in and just trying you never know what to expect, but there are so many things I wish I knew would have come up during my first event. Had I not put on Start Norfolk, Hatch never would have happened and who knows if the Norfolk Startup Community would exist today. I'm sure glad I did though!

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## Chapter Three

### Finding Sponsors

**Early Bird:** Finding sponsors is all prep work, think of it as the work a restaurant does every morning before they open. This way when you do announce, not only do you have several sponsors, you also have validation to your attendees through sponsors. I recommend breaking down each of your price points into different categories, small medium and large potential sponsors. For this exercise, please go after those in the small category and before you announce your event.

Let's say your event costs **\$10k** to put on and you are looking to raise all of that in sponsors, so you can have a smaller ticket price for you attendees. When looking for sponsors, find the easiest way to achieve that number and go after it.

Example: How much work would it take you to find one person who will give you \$10k or would it be easier to find 10 companies at \$1k each or maybe a mixture of sponsorships prices. Whatever it is, go after the easiest and most likely to sponsor first.

Don't sell yourself short either, you don't want to undersell a large sponsor. Meaning, if you think there is a chance a large sponsorship is available, do not offer them the simple early bird package. By gaining a large amount of sponsors at a lower rate, you are validating your event to companies who will give you a larger amount of funds later.

I've had several companies ask who else is sponsoring and depending on who I say, they will or will not sponsor. Some are looking at competitors and will sponsor along with them, while others will stay clear.

Are you putting on a business or tech related event. Look for other tech companies in your area or those who may be selling a product or service that your attendees may use. A local hosting company, Wordpress plugin, are a great place to start.

What about a fitness related event. You most likely won't have the same attendee as a tech related event, so you want to make sure that you look for those companies in the fitness field. Corporate giants like Dicks Sporting Good and The Sports Authority are tough to obtain, so go after the local Chamber of Commerce, local fitness stores or bloggers who may live in your town.

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You are selling early access and exposure. Because they will be a part of the original announcement of your event, these sponsors will receive the most exposure. The value in the early bird price is huge. Ask your friends who will likely attend your event to introduce you to their marketing team and their company and pitch the early bird sponsor rate.

The goal for this exercise is to add value to your event by adding several companies to your sponsorship package. This shows that other companies value your event and are willing to give money to support it. So, what do you sell to them? A ticket to the event, a logo on your website and an opportunity to get in front of X number of potential customers.

## Sample Example Email:

Hey <name>,

*I hope you are doing awesome. It's great seeing how much <name of company> has grown over the years and I'm so glad you are a part of our community. As you may know the fourth Start Norfolk is just around the corner, Sept 27-29.*

*Start Norfolk has grown fast, 400% growth fast. We've seen over 160 ideas pitched, over 700 attend and a real push for startups in our region. Recently, Entrepreneur Magazine named Norfolk to its top new tech cities and Virginia Beach as a top spot to do business. We need to have a constant pipeline of startups in our region to continue to grow and be competitive nationwide.*

*Start Norfolk fills that void and allows our area to meet or exceed what other markets are doing across the US.*

*Attached, you will find a sponsorship package for Start Norfolk. Please take a look and let me know if one interests you. If the attached isn't of interest, we can also do a smaller scale of \$500-\$1000 bucks which will give you company a sponsorship presence online and mentioned throughout the event.*

*Would love to chat more if you have any questions. Please call my cell anytime.*

*Take Care!*



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**Later Birds:** Start reaching out to folks in your immediate networks who could be sponsors, and let them know about the event. You are not selling them the package at this point rather educating them on the event.

Sales is something that takes time and all too often the sale is lost because those interested are not ready to buy, yet feel pushed to buy now. Instead, break it down into a few stages, this can be through a few emails, phone calls or in person meetings. If time is critical, you can release all at once but be sure to heavily educate and show value before you push the sell.

You must show the value your sponsor is getting or else they will not hand over the check. Educate people on the basics. This is one of the first times, people will be hearing about the event. You must create hype. Say who will be there, why they are important and any key takeaways. What others there are doing. Show what their competitors are doing, how they've grown and the ROI that your event can help them with. Show that it is not just about leads, but can also be about new employees, community leadership and becoming an educational resource.

***Educate them with real samples, previous events, why your event is critical for them to be a sponsor***

**Hard Sell:** Wrap everything you have shown them into one thorough email with the package attached. This is your best chance to get the sale.

By the time you get to the hard sell, there shouldn't be any questions remaining. In each message or interaction you have with each potential sponsor, be sure to let them know that if they have any questions to ask you at any time. The stronger your relationship with the customer the better chance you have to get the sponsorship.

***Sponsorships are just like sales and it's a process, sometimes longer than desired, but following a pattern will maximize your returns.***

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## Chapter Four Finding Attendees

Create an event website, using your own website or a third party

List the important data

Name of Event (Catchy Easy to Grasp Name)

Where: The Location and any additional information for attendees on where to park, etc.

When: Date and time, add a rundown of events if possible

About: Why should people attend your event?

For those not interested in signing up at that point, collect an email address and follow up at a later time. (some third party sites won't allow you to do this)

### Reaching Out to Your Network

At this point, you have targeted your event topic and have created your marketing. Now, you will need to tell people about your event. Before you go and tell the whole world, think about 10 people you know that would be interested in attending.

Email them and invite them to the event. If your event has a charge, offer them a discount or free ticket.

### Sample Email:

*"Hey Charles,*

*I hope you are doing well. I am kicking off a new event called New Tech Meetup, which brings together the best founders, startups and investors in our area and features 2 local companies each month. It's free and I'd love to have you attend. If you can come, please RSVP here (use link). Feel free to invite those in your network that are looking to learn about local companies.*

*If you have any questions, feel free to call me or email me.  
Thanks."*

Your objective is to get people talking about your event before you announce.

# How To: Launch an Event to Grow Your Business

## **Announcing Your Event**

The time has come to announce your event. Up to 80% of organizing an event happens before you announce to the group.

Your goal here is to get people talking and ultimately signing up to attend.

The best days to announce events are Tuesday at 10am.

## **Simple Social Media**

If you believe your event will be long term, create a facebook and twitter page for both. You will also want to create a universal hashtag for your event.

Ex. If your event is called Norfolk Tech Meetup, create a hashtag #NFKTech, which is an abbreviation of Norfolk and using tech.

If you are organizing a one time event, like Ignite (City) Produce a hashtag, #IgniteNorfolk

## Chapter Five

### Event Logistics

#### **Prep the Venue**

Be prepared at your venue at least one hour before the event is supposed to start. Often people will show up early to talk with organizers.

#### **Test out your audio/visual**

#### **Tweet Out Your Event Hashtag**

Make it easy for people to know the # for the event and encourage attendees to tweet often during meetup.

#### **Watch the Clock**

If you say your event will be one hour, stick to it. There is nothing worse than an event that runs over.

Keep quality control up and if something happens and continues to run on, stop it.

#### **Thank Attendees**

When the event is complete, thank attendees and invite them to your next event or some sort of Call To Action on upcoming events.

If you did not collect an email during signup, have a sign in sheet at the door and collect email, name, etc.

## Chapter Six

### After Event Sponsors

When your event is over, be sure to follow up with your sponsors. You can do this by simply emailing them about how the event went along with some of the basic statistics, attendees, tweets, etc. If your attendees tweeted or mentioned specifically about your sponsor be sure to send them that information too. The data you can quantify for them, the more likely they will see an ROI and sponsor in the future.

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