



# Please Don't Call it a Party

by Carolyn Lavin

Companies often seek to build awareness about years-in-business milestones, expansion and moves, and other newsworthy accolades via business events. These business-centric gatherings allow organizations to connect with clients, customers, prospects and other centers-of-influence for face-time; events are a nice change of pace from the world of e-mail communication and phone conferences that often dominate our time-stressed interactions.

## **Your Business Goals. Your Measure of Success.**

The key to a successful event is to solidify your business goals right from the start. How will you measure the results and the return-on-investment of your company's time, dollars and energy? For some businesses, the goal is to increase awareness and be top-of-mind. For others, showing the breadth and depth of the operation or team is compelling. Sometimes, a business wants to tweak its image or introduce a new product or service line.

No matter the goal, a business event is all about business development. I always recommend less focus on pomp and circumstance, and more attention to goals and opportunities. Business events offer chances for cross-selling and expanding current relationships, securing work from prospects and referral sources, and good old-fashioned talk-time for client retention.

**“ In most cases, beer and wine suffice and set a tone that says your gathering is not all about drinking ”**

## **Keep it Simple.**

When planning a business event, keep it unpretentious. This is not your son's bar mitzvah, your daughter's sweet sixteen or your family reunion.

Selecting a location will depend on where you and your customers are based, options for parking and your guesstimated attendance. In most cases, beer and wine suffice and set a tone that says your gathering is not all about drinking; interesting but not over-the-top (or messy) hors d'oeuvres add some flair. Basic name-tags are a must for mingling and interaction. Music, favors, flowers and photography are not obligatory, and may depend on the scale of the event.

Once your invitation is sent, you can start personally inviting your VIPs. Contact them by phone or email, leveraging the opportunity to reinforce your purpose for celebration. You might run into them on the streets of downtown Providence, at the gym or in a favorite restaurant. Everyone loves getting an invitation.

## **Beyond The Event.**

Business events are not merely about the people who attend. Using an e-invitation and a tech-savvy approach with a resource such as Constant Contact, a company can receive messages from invited guests who cannot attend. These tools let you send out a second invitation to those who have not responded and even send customized reminders with last-minute details about parking, weather, etc.

Post-event follow-up is crucial, both with those who revealed business opportunities at your gathering but also with key individuals not in attendance. Generate a go-to-lunch list to connect with your target individuals; be sure to capture any changes in contact information in your company database. In today's world of relationship-building, events are a vital component of a company's marketing plan. Be sure to leverage your next business event to retain clients, network with referral sources, and reach prospects.