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Three ways to get more out of your client events this year



Think back to the last client appreciation event you hosted.

Now, put yourself into your clients' and prospects' shoes.

How might they describe the event to a friend? Will they put you, your team and your brand at the center of that recollection? Or will the guest speaker or location be the highlight of the story?

In the spirit of continual improvement and setting goals that can have a significant impact on growth, I encourage you to view client appreciation events as a method for boosting your credibility with clients and increasing their awareness of you and your brand. You will be surprised how much the audience's level of engagement increases during and after the event.

Here are three ideas for you to consider that I have seen successful advisors implement:

1. **Select a date that works for your target audience** Many advisors pick a date for the client appreciation event that is convenient for them and their guest speaker, with little consideration for what is most convenient for their clients and prospects. Break that trend. Reach out to your clients and find out what timing and location is most convenient for them. You don't even need to make that a separate phone call—you can simply ask them at a regularly scheduled review. Clients tend to feel an obligation to attend an event if they were partially involved in the decision-making process. Of course, be sure to send a save the date notice, followed by an invitation. Additionally, a call from you, the advisor, one week prior to the event to let the client know you're looking forward to seeing them is a personal touch that has a big impact.

- 2. Put yourself back in the narrative** In my many years of serving as a guest speaker at hundreds of advisor-sponsored client appreciation events, I have observed that many advisors miss the chance at these events to connect with the audience by featuring their own expertise and personality. They are so busy ensuring the event runs smoothly and being host(ess) with the most(est), that they forget to take the opportunity to share their own insights, as well as those of the guest speaker.

How do I know? Because after my presentations, audience members invariably asked me for my business card and my take on their portfolio. But I'm simply the subject matter expert on today's particular investment topic. The *advisor* is the expert on those individual portfolio questions, on working with investors to help them meet their long-term investment goals in a way that reflects their circumstances and honors their preferences. How can you put yourself back into the narrative at your client appreciation events? Consider structuring the presentation as a conversation between you and the subject matter expert. Or use an interview format where you ask the subject matter expert questions you know are relevant to your clients' and prospects' circumstances.

This format creates a powerful opening for you to demonstrate your command of the topic so that the audience seeks *you* out of the presentation. Just because you are a gracious host greeting your guests, introducing the speaker, and wrapping up the event by thanking clients for attending, doesn't mean you can't also be part of the presentation. In essence, this is the format in which many people are accustomed to consuming information today: Good Morning America, Tucker Carlsson, The View. These shows captivate and convey the insights of the guest as well as those of the host.

How can you orchestrate such an interaction? Several weeks before your event, review a copy of the guest speaker's presentation (most of the time these decks are off-the-shelf) and schedule time with the speaker to discuss the topic and explore ways to create a role for you in the conversation. This is quite different from the typical approach: often, the advisor and speaker's first contact takes place an hour before the event is scheduled to begin! That doesn't leave enough time for the advisor and speaker to agree on a collaborative presentation approach.

Whether you're hosting an investment firm's economist to discuss the markets, a social security expert or a cybercrime specialist, any presentation can easily be turned into an interview or conversation with some advance preparation.

- 3. Add an Events page to your website** Few advisors have such a page and it can give you an edge. After all, your events are an extension of your firm's identity and they demonstrate your culture. Listing them on your website gives a surfing prospect or referral a better overall picture of your firm. It is also valuable to keep your old events on the "events" page. Don't delete them. Instead, push them to the bottom and say "previous events." This reinforces the image that you're here to stay and are committed to continuously providing excellent customer service.

The bottom line

Client appreciation events are a worthwhile investment both in your clients and in the well-being of your firm. You are building community while keeping connected with clients and ensuring new client acquisition opportunities through a memorable experience, which can ultimately be repeated every year with great anticipation and buzz. Take the time in 2018 to make a few changes that will make your client appreciation events more impactful to the growth of your business.

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