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MEDIA SOLUTIONS

Get Recognized at Your Next Conference by Reporting on It

By David Spark, Founder of Spark Media Solutions, LLC
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I attend a lot of conferences, and one of the saddest things to see is a sponsor standing in his booth alone, talking to no one. When I see that all I can think is what a giant waste of time and money. With that passive attitude, they've set themselves up for failure. The only way someone is going to talk to them is if they happen to write some good headline copy on their booth to attract attention. Otherwise, they're doomed.

More than a year and a half ago I began covering live events for my business, Spark Media Solutions. I primarily report for event producers, but I realized there's no reason why a sponsor of an event can't also cover a conference or trade show. My belief is if you come to report on an event, rather than just sponsor it, you'll get a lot more value, attention, and connections.

What are you getting out of that conference you're attending?

I love attending live events because it's a physical collection of smart people conversing on like-minded subjects. And while people talk about the boon of social media, nothing beats face-to-face communications. That's how we begin and forward our relationships and our education.

Sponsoring an event is a great way to get your brand associated with an event. But after you pony up the money, it's up to you to create the greatest value out of that. How many times have you been at a conference and you've experienced one if not all of the following:

- Frustrated that no one was coming to your table.
- Got your time monopolized by people that weren't going to buy or write about your product.
- Didn't get any press or bloggers to come to your table or write about your company.
- Few people came to your booth because they were attending sessions and talking with each other.
- You're exhausted because you can only talk to so many people in a given day.
- Your booth signage didn't attract people to come talk to you.
- Boredom.

The reason for all of these negative experiences is because just sponsoring an event has its limitations. When you sponsor an event, you're only connecting with people who walk up to your table. And even if you have a really successful booth, you still only reached all the people you could physically touch during the show.

You can't count on press, and if you do, then you probably had to hire and pay some PR reps to wander the floor to wrangle some journalists to your booth, hoping they write about you. Big events, like CES, are swarming with journalists and they write about everything. But most events are not like CES. If you're sponsoring a small user conference there won't be any journalists. Smaller industry conferences may have a few trade journalists there and they'll write one or maybe two articles about the entire event. You'll never get a feature story about you. At most, you'll have to settle for a line or two in that one article.

You can avoid all of these limitations, connect with key people and influencers, and be seen as a voice in your industry if you simply just report, from your company voice, at the event.

Don't just sponsor. Report, and be seen as a voice.

Reporting at an event is not limited to just journalists and bloggers. Any organization can be a media entity that tells the story of what's happening at the conference. Using a simple blog format, go to an event and report on the subject of the event and the people who are attending.

Your booth can only connect with a single message. By reporting, you can reach out to the interests of your audience, and show that you're a significant member of the conversation that's relevant to your industry.

The value of reporting at a live event

Once you establish that you're going to take off your marketing hat and begin covering the event from an editorial viewpoint, here are all the benefits your business will experience.

Co-opt the editorial and publicity of the event - No need to do your own publicity or gather an audience. Take advantage of all the work the event producers have done to drive attention to their event.

High interest in your content - Since you're reporting will be in line with the editorial of the event, the audience has already been pre-qualified to be interested in your reporting.

Very easy to meet influencers - It's a lot easier to meet industry influencers and hold their attention if you first ask for their opinion. How do you think influencers become influencers? They say yes to interviews. This ego boosting exercise is a far more comfortable way to begin a relationship than trying to get them to pay attention to your product pitch.

Get access to bloggers' audience - Give away your content to anyone who wants it. And if you happen to actually interview a blogger or write about them, let them know. In most cases they'll repurpose the content on their own site. Also, if the event's show page or blog is pulling in RSS feeds of related content, your articles will also appear there.

Implied endorsement of your company - By reporting at the event and interviewing key bloggers and influencers, you're aligning your brand and reputation with theirs. Even if nothing is actually said, by physically placing the stories on each other's sites, the relationship is implied.

Crank up your search visibility - By using the name of the event, the companies, and the people attending in your reporting, your blog entries will inevitably appear in search results as others look for content related to the event.

Lower cost to production - A live event places all the people you want to interview within an arm's reach. That translates into enormous time and cost savings. No need to go through a series of phone calls, emails, and barriers of media relations people to get an interview. Instead, just walk up to the person at the conference and ask a question. The reason they're there is to meet people and talk.

Extend your reach beyond the room and the event - Many of the people interested in the content of the event won't be there, or they may want to look at the information after the event. You can't connect with everyone during the event. But if you publish content about the event, you'll be able to connect with them afterwards.

The event producers will love you - Any coverage of the event brings more attention to the event.

Focus group surveys and business development - Get some free consulting and advice by interviewing event attendees about issues your company is wrestling with.

Greater bang for the buck - It costs the same or less than an event sponsorship and you get lots more value.

Are you currently putting your sponsorship money to good use?

Try this exercise. Take a look at the last event you sponsored and all the costs and time you put into preparing for it. Add up all the costs:

- The event sponsorship
- Design and production of the booth signage
- Giveaways
- Attending staff including PR reps (salary, flight, hotel, meals, extra registration, etc.)

What did you get out of the event? \$10K, \$20K, \$100K, more? How many people did you actually meet? Did you get the coverage that you wanted? Reporting at a live event can deliver all of the above benefits most often way below these costs.

For your next event, don't just hope for exposure and connections, create your own.

(Get ready for my company pitch...)

Let Spark Media Solutions make you the life of the party

My company, **Spark Media Solutions**, can report on the event for you, in your industry voice. We find the influencers, bloggers, and key people in your industry. We ask the right questions and create the stories in print, audio, video, and in pictures that are most relevant for your company and your industry. Here's what we do:

- As the event is happening, we produce quality content quickly while at the same time alerting industry influencers via social media of all the new reporting.
- We get key interviews that others can't get.
- All our production is completed when the event is finished. We know that interest is at its highest during the event. That's why we think it's important to work quickly.

At one three-day conference, a single reporter was able to produce forty blog posts of which twenty-six had video. We're able to produce so quickly and so well for the following reasons:

- We're always using the top technology, hardware, and software to gather and distribute the reporting we do for you.
- We use an endless array of proprietary shortcuts to gather and distribute the stories.
- We're veteran journalists that know how to go after valuable stories. Where an inexperienced person may go after twenty stories and only produce two, we go after twenty stories and produce nineteen.

Read on for a full description of our services, testimonials, and samples of Spark Media Solutions' work.

If you're interested in having your company reporting at a live event, please contact me at david@sparkmediasolutions.com or 415-794-9135.