

## How to Fill a Room: Promoting Your Event

When you go to the trouble of creating an event, it is always a great idea to fill the room with people! There is nothing worse than coming to the starting time with a large room full of empty chairs.

*Greatest Canadian Tommy Douglas, Father of the Canadian Medicare system, knew the psychology of 'filling a room to the rafters'. It creates credibility and excitement, and gives the impression that things are happening. He booked a small venue rather than a large meeting place. He asked the hosts to put out just a few chairs. Then when people started arriving, they brought out more chairs. And then more chairs. Imagine the thrill of seeing people overflowing the space, with standing room only!*

There are two basic strategies that will help to fill your event:

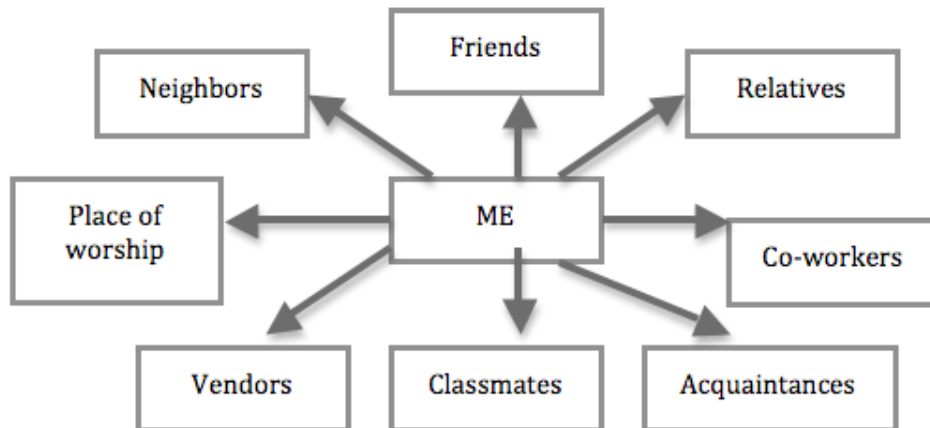
1. Networking/confirmation
2. Publicity/promotion

While both strategies are important, networking/confirmation is by far the most effective.

Here are some tips for having a full house at your event. These actions take place as soon as the event location and date have been confirmed.

### Networking

1. Create a core team
  - a) Set up a team of 2-6 people to be the Core Networkers.
  - b) Have each Core Networker find 2 or more others who will agree to help promote the event. This means there will be a total of 6-18 Networkers participating. More can be added at any time.
2. Meet in person or by conference call with all of the Networkers.
  - a) Have each Networker develop his or her own "treasure mind-map" in preparation for networking. A treasure mind-map looks something like this:



- b) Brainstorm additional categories. Each Networker then lists the names of people they know in each category. Don't worry about censoring who is likely or not likely to attend the event. People can decide that for themselves.
  - e) Each Networker agrees to invite as many people as they can who are listed on their treasure mind-map.
3. Provide Networkers with flyers, or sample email invitations to make their job easier
    - a) Networkers email or deliver the invitations.
    - b) Networkers follow up the invitation with a phone call or personal visit to confirm whether or not the invitee plans to attend.
    - c) Networkers report back to the Core Networkers each time an event attendee is confirmed.
  4. Core Networkers update all Networkers on a regular basis with regard to the total number of confirmed event attendees.
    - a) Core Networkers and Networkers can have fun with setting target goals for reaching certain numbers by certain dates.
    - b) A couple of days before the event, all Networkers call their confirmed attendees to remind them of the event and let them know they will be excited to see them there. At this point, some of the confirmed attendees may say they can no longer attend. Report these dropouts to the Core Networkers for tracking purposes.

The camaraderie of the Networking team keeps the event promotion alive throughout the promotion period. Confirming guests for the event in advance allows planners a much better idea of how many people will actually attend the event. Typically about 75% of those confirmed will actually attend, so keep going and be prepared to 'fill the room to the rafters'.

### **Publicity**

Most people need to see or hear about an event 5 to 8 times before it actually registers with them, whereas a personal invitation from networking (above) is much more powerful. With that in mind, here are tips for gaining public awareness of your event:

1. Press Release
  - a) Write a one page description of the event (Press Release). Include a captivating headline and first sentence, link the event to something current in the news, and include when and where the event will take place, who will be there, cost, and where proceeds will go (if relevant).
  - b) Make a list of all TV and radio stations and newspapers in your region.
  - c) See if you can find the name of a person in charge of receiving Press Releases in each of these media centers.
  - d) Fax or email a copy of the Press Release to each of the people whose names you found in c. Send "To Whom It May Concern" if you do not have a name.
  - e) Follow up within 48 hours with a phone call to the person or media center to see if they received the Press Release.
  - f) Offer interviews with filmmakers or other relevant experts if media centers are interested.
  - g) Write articles or letters to the editors to bring the event to the attention of the media and the public.

## 2. Posters

- a) Create professional looking posters in 3 sizes: 27X40, 11X17 and 5.5 X 8.5 (half page flyer). Check prices for printing/copying these posters and be prepared to pay for copying as part of your event budget.
- b) List all places where posters might be posted- stores, coffee shops, schools, colleges, libraries, places of worship, bathroom stalls, bulletin boards, etc.
- c) Send out a team of volunteers to put up the posters in the listed places. Where possible, give a poster to a real live person in those settings and personally invite that person to attend the event.

## 3. Notices

- a) Write three versions of a notice about the event: short, medium, and long. The short version can be used in announcements or orders of service. It includes basic information like the title, date, time, location of the event, and a short descriptive sentence. The medium version contains a paragraph about the event. The long version can be about 3 paragraphs. Put all three versions on one page so the recipients can choose the length of message that works for them.
- b) Make a list of organizations, faith groups, colleges or universities, faculties or departments, businesses, etc. that may have a listing of people who might be interested in your event.
- c) Find out the name and contact information of a person at these organizations who is in charge of communicating to their members.
- d) Send by email the three versions of the notice, asking them if they would be willing to publish a notice in their newsletter to their members.
- e) Follow up within 48 hours with a phone call to the contact person to see if they received the notice and if they have any questions.
- f) Keep a record of contact results from each organization to track their responses to the request. Ask them to email you a copy of the notice they are sending out if that is possible.

## 4. Social Networking

- a) Create a Facebook Page or post the event on an existing Facebook page
- b) Create a Facebook Invitation
- c) Tweet about the event or post tweets on relevant Twitter accounts.

***“Courage, my friends; ‘tis not too late to build a better world.”***  
**~Tommy Douglas**