



43 Using hospitality and special days

You can build stronger relationships with both your key customers and prospective clients by inviting them to join you for hospitality at special events. Corporate hospitality is available at a variety of memorable and important events both at home and overseas. A day at the races, a box at the British Grand Prix, a party at the Henley Royal Regatta, tickets for Wimbledon or world cup football are just some of the things you can do. You can provide a special tent or table dedicated to your organisation and the pleasure of your guests. You can organise this yourself or you can use the services of any number of corporate hospitality and event organisers.

You can offer your clients opportunities to find out more about your products and services by creating special events that educate them and provide fun and entertainment at the same time. There is a section in Chapter 11 of this book that focuses solely on how to use events and talks to sell your business.

You can invite clients and their teams to join you and your teams for a day of fun and bonding by going go-carting, playing golf, sailing or partying at a polo match.

You can take your clients out for a special lunch or dinner or to the theatre. You can invite them to special conferences or congresses abroad. Christmas parties or summer barbeques can be a less expensive way of providing fun and entertainment if you have a smaller budget.

Why are invitations to special events important?

Being invited to a unique special event or day out can be exciting for your customers. It will make them feel highly valued by you. The invitation acknowledges their importance to you. This can only be good for your relationship with them. If the event you choose is high profile you stand to gain the kudos that goes with it. People will want to attend the event and will connect your organisation with giving them that opportunity. If you simply go out and have fun with your customers and get to know them in a social setting, you will create the opportunity to build a much stronger connection. People do business with people who they like and trust. This is one of the greatest rapport-building opportunities.

Your challenge

Your challenge will be to choose the right events and not to spend your entire marketing budget in one go. Providing corporate hospitality and tickets for high profile events can be expensive so you need to weigh up the potential the event has for building stronger existing client relationships and introducing new ones.

If you do decide to have a hospitality tent, room or table at an event you will need to make sure that you make the most of it. This will take planning and organising.

What makes hospitality and special days work?

- You must be clear exactly what you want the event to achieve for you.
- Choose the right event and the right mix of people.
- Make sure it is well organised from invitation to follow up.
- Staff are fully briefed, each having an important role to play.
- The senior people in your organisation commit to attend the day.
- Your guests' names are remembered.
- The day is used to reinforce your organisation's values.
- You look after your guests and put their well-being and enjoyment at the top of your priority list.
- If you offer your guests the opportunity to find out more about the people in your organisation, take the time to find out more about them too.
- Consider creative ways to help your guests relax and get to know each other.
- It should be more social than business – it is nice just to relax sometimes.
- Make sure that you have a proper follow-up system in place.
- Get feedback – find out what your guests think about the day.

HOSPITALITY EVENT OR SPECIAL DAY – SPECIAL RESPONSE CHECKLIST

- ▶ What do you want the day to achieve (customer/team bonding, new business, keep existing customers, product launch, say thank you)?
- ▶ Who would you invite and why?
- ▶ What are the interests of the people you are considering?
- ▶ What events do you think your guests would connect with?
- ▶ Which events would give your organisation some distinction?
- ▶ What needs planning (invitations, hospitality area layout and design, seating plans, time-table, team briefing, follow up)?
- ▶ How will you measure the success of the event?
- ▶ How will you know personally if it has been successful?

How to use this information

If you haven't considered using hospitality, special days out or events to build your client relationships maybe this is your chance to do that. Investigate what you could do. Ask your clients what they would like to do and get your best ones involved in your decision making process. Ask your team what they think. Try it and see what happens.

Think hospitality and have some fun with your clients