

Extreme Themes

“Dream ‘Em, Research Em, & Get the Stuff Cheap”

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Dream ‘Em!

Successful events require passion, hard work and camaraderie to achieve the common goal. Many adults forget how to have fun, are too embarrassed, or, are too concerned about responsibilities to consider the natural healing capabilities of simple, relaxing, carefree, plain natural fun.

“God is in the Details” Mies Van Der Rohe

It's not enough just to decorate. The “Theme” should start as early as possible and be incorporated into everything; Sponsor packs, correspondence, invites, food, drink, wearables, giveaways, entertainment, everything. It's the little “extras” that make all the difference and make your event memorable.

A Theme should:

Communicate - A theme should both develop from and reinforce an event's message.

Entertain – A theme should create enjoyable experiences.

Interact - Action stations that combine and present the theme for a total guest experience.

Educate – Edutainment – *It doesn't have to be a just a bunch of fluff, include trivia, quotes, interesting bits of fact, recipes and more.*

Excite – Emotions, Innovative – *Pull at the heartstrings, raise their pulse rate and make them stare with their mouth open.*

Inspire - *An effective theme can create the stimulus needed for attendees to “want” to come, perceive the event as the “place to be,” and to “spread the word” so others will want to share the experience.*

Involve the Senses:

Sight – Background, Spectacle, Dimensional

Touch – Temperature, Quality, Reactionary

Sound – Subtle, Fortify, Enhance

Smell – Floral, Musty, Spicy

Taste – Flavor, Beverage, Mysterious

Anticipation – Known, Unknown, WOW

When you dream up the perfect theme, it's best to hold back from sharing too much until the time is right. The unexpected and the surprises are what complete a theme.

Everything Relates:

Color – Vibrant, Subdued, Juxtaposed, Minimal

Texture – Rough, Glossy, Smooth, Organic

Atmosphere – Fog, Mist, Breeze, Motion

Scale – Big, Small, Gigantic, Miniature

Pattern – Tonal, Overwhelming, Themed, Repetitive

Mood – Fun, Somber, Serious, Relaxing

Size – Attendees, Staff, Volunteers, Sponsors

Style – Formal, Casual, Business, Educational

Interaction – Active, Passive, Memory, Comfort

Lighting – Moving, Shaped, Accent, Effect

Lighting is cheap and can add drama; patterned gobos can carry out your theme and will make an impact the moment the guests walk in.

Memory Makers:

Expected – Childhood, Family, Media

Unexpected – Cheerleaders, Pony Rides, Celebrities

Historic – Fact, Fiction, Heroic

Fantastic – Amplify, Spirited,

Photographs – Novelty, Online, Group

Keepsakes – Trinkets, Printed, ID's – ***Don't ever let them leave empty handed!***

A Theme ties it all together:

- 1.) A theme provides guidelines and a clear message for your event. Everything should relate to the theme.
- 2.) A theme can help limit the amount of information which makes your message easier to understand.
- 3.) A theme helps bring participants closer together providing people with a common identity and a shared experience.
- 4.) A theme can be used to "position" your event in people's minds, meaning that when they are regaling an enjoyable experience, they speak of your event.
- 5.) A theme arouses expectations, builds suspense, invokes interest and adds a distinct dimension to your event.

Theme problems to avoid:

1. The "Same Old" Theme

People often take the easy route and develop a theme with what they know. The key to an effective theme is to make it different, with a unique twist and plenty of UNEXPECTED surprises. **Effective themes are not always about dreaming up new motifs, but rethinking enduring favorites.** People remember themes that are different, appealing, fun, educational and most importantly memorable.

2. The "Inappropriate" Theme

A theme should be based on your identity and centered on the needs and desires of your target audience. Your identity is the basis for your theme and your audience the focal point of it. Make your theme fit your event, not your event fit your theme. Everyone and everything a visitor has contact with communicates and promotes something about your organization.

3. The "No Buy in" Theme

An **ineffective** theme can wreck havoc on your staff, volunteers and audience. "Buy in" is crucial because anything anyone says or does concerning your event communicates something about your organization. You don't want anything negative. Volunteers & staff are in a unique position to be a source of informal, word-of-mouth promotion that influences people. An **effective** theme underlines all aspects of your event and builds pride amongst all the participants. A good theme should entice, enthrall and excite your entire organization. Involve everyone in all aspects of your theme; make them an integral part and the payoff will be worth the extra effort. Annual events with changing themes can provide year-round anticipation and greater buy-in.

4. The "Great Idea but ..." Theme

Be realistic! A themed event needs to be done legitimately and to completion; it can't be a partial attempt. An effective theme should entail a carefully conceived plan. Determine if the theme can be accomplished based on the available budget, time frame and resources available and if it will work operationally and spatially. Most importantly pick a theme that will be fun and enjoyable for everyone. **If you can't do it well, don't do it!** Budgets are budgets but a resourceful team can do amazing things. There is never enough time or money and life tends to happen when least expected, but effective scheduling and good organization can accomplish miracles. America is the most generous of nations and resources are everywhere, but if you don't ask you won't get.

5. The "All over the Place" Theme

Don't be too broad or too narrow, a successful theme must have a "Distinct Vision." Give a theme time to evolve and don't dismiss any ideas. However you may need to refine or develop ideas further based on budget, time and resources. Determine the impressions, memories and experiences you want emblazoned in the attendees' minds. Develop the vision until you know it inside and out and have conveyed it effectively to all concerned. Don't be afraid to delegate, but keep tabs on the progress, budget and quality. Strong, effective leadership is the key.

The best part about Themes is the Endless Ideas & Exciting Opportunities which are possible!

Research 'Em!

In real estate the catch phrase is "location, location, location."

The "Extreme Themes" catch phrase is "**RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH!**"

Start with Brainstorming:

Get everyone involved in the creative process

- Invite committee
- Designers
- Engineers
- People that work with their hands
- Left Brained
- Right Brained

Make the environment appropriate for the "creative process"

- Music
- Paper & Pens
- Food & Drink
- Fun

Designated Scribe!!!

Brainstorm Each Event Component:

- Invitations
- Registration
- Concessions
- Entrance
- Tables/Centerpieces
- Entertainment
- Operations
- Words

Got the basic Theme, now what?

Do the Research:

- Books
- Magazines
- Library
- Television
- Movies
- Music
- Internet – follow the links on websites
- Field Trips

Another Brainstorming

Share the research:

- Narrow the field
- Pick & Choose

Give it time to develop

- Add & Subtract as needed

The Final Theme:

Write a descriptive paragraph!

- Utilize in all printed materials
- Use in Promotions

Start the Buzz:

- Committee emails
- Names & Teams
- Workdays Treats
- Attendee teases
- Tell everyone and their Brother

Get the Stuff Cheap!

Rule #1 - You **MUST** have a Truck! (A Van will work in a pinch)

Rule # 2 - "Grab the Bull by the Horns" when the opportunity presents itself!

Rule # 3 – Beg, Borrow, & Steal!

Rule #4 - If you don't ask/tell you won't get!

Rule #5 - Don't wait for one event to end before dreaming of the next theme. (See Rule #2)

The Internet:

Some Favorite Websites:

www.lowcostprints.com – great prints for any theme

www.wholesaleforeveryone.com – bandannas & other stuff

www.mcphee.com – crazy odd stuff, décor, costumes

www.dollardays.com – lots of items, décor, costumes, novelties, centerpieces

www.orientaltrading.com - novelties

www.funexpress.com – novelties by the case

www.shindigz.com – décor, table cover, backgrounds

www.rinovelty.com – décor, novelties, party supplies, costumes

www.smalltoys.com – toys, novelties

www.rebeccas.com – toys, novelties

www.elpasosaddleblanket.com – Western, Southwest, Mexican – giveaways, décor, novelties, boutique

www.daybag.com – bulk burlap (2" to 6" wide), erosion cloth, colors & much more

www.justmurals.com – Wallpaper Mural backgrounds

www.sav-on-closeouts.com – Lots of stuff

Search words to use:

Bulk

Wholesale

Discount

Cheap

Closeout

Sales:

Outside:

Garage Sales/ Estate Sales

Church & School Rummage Sales

Auctions

Inside:

Going out of Business

Closeouts - *End of season – work a year ahead

Thrift Stores – Salvation Army, Goodwill

Department stores – Kohls, Kmart, Target

Home Improvement/Hardware – Menards, Home Depot, Lowes, Ace, True Value,

Specialty stores – Card factory Outlet, Garden Centers, Boutiques

Dollar stores – Big Lots, Dollar Tree, Dollar General,

Bigger Discounts:

Ask if you buy it all is there any more discount?

Tell them "I'm an NFP!" (Usually gets at least an extra 10%)

Kmart vs. Kohls (They gave me it for this how about you matching it)

Trade tickets, buttons, passes, signage, advertisement, booth space, etc.

Other Sources:

Union Partnerships – Non creative jobs welcome a challenging creative outlet

Retailers/Commercial – Just Ask! Lumber, Paint, Props, Designers

Professional Theatres – Use their expertise, borrow

Schools/Colleges – Use their expertise, borrow

Family/Friends – A wealth of resources

Co-workers – Get the word out

The side of the road – Nature's bounty