COMMUNITY EVENT MARKETING PLAN

This marketing plan is a free resource for small volunteer community groups who are organising an online or offline event and want to get the word out into the world, efficiently with limited marketing skills and zero budget.

It was designed by Nat Mendham, based on the strategy we use to promote the Harvest and Springfest events at the Warrane Community Garden, in southern lutruwita/Tasmania.

It's a proven strategy for a physical event, but this plan could be adapted for an online event too.

The intention is that you use this as a leaping-off point and adapt it freely to suit your event and audience. Take what you need, and have fun promoting your event!

"This marketing plan helped our small and under-resourced team to understand our event goals, audience and allies. It's super efficient, easy to follow and continues to be effective in getting the word out about our seasonal festivals."

– Katie Kristensen (Garden Coordinator at Warrane Community Garden)

NAT MENDHAM

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First up

- Have a read of this whole document
- Gather your team (many hands make light work)
- Save the schedule into your calendars. The most important dates to lock in are around 8, 6 and 1 week before your event.
- Ensure you have the passwords and access you need for the accounts we list in the 'You Will Need' section.

Aims

1. To create a marketing plan that is sustainable for a small team of volunteers to undertake.
2. To know your audience and communicate as clearly as possible.
3. To spend nothing on ads or social media boosts.
4. To make it as easy as possible for your allies to help you promote your event to their audiences.
5. Add your own aims here .....

You will need

- ☐ 2 to 3 people with basic computer skills, who can meet once or twice before the event, either in person or via video conference. You may like to recruit a few more volunteers if you want to put up posters, and signs or do a letterbox drop.
- ☐ A Google Drive folder. This is the easiest tool to share documents, but sharing via email would work too. You'll be using this folder to store your event promotion graphics, a spreadsheet, this document, and any other digital things your team needs.
- ☐ Access to Canva. A free online graphic design tool that you can use to make promotional materials that look amazing without graphic design skills.
- ☐ Access to whatever digital media your group has already like your website, newsletter platform, and social media. Note that it usually takes a little while to figure out how to share access with your teammates, especially Facebook, so account for a bit of faffing about to do that. (Here are some instructions for Facebook in particular.)
- ☐ Perhaps a printer, or a signwriter if you require posters, or corflute signs to be made.
- ☐ If you are selling tickets to your event, you will need to set that up on the event ticketing platform of your choosing. You'll need the link to the public ticket page to add to your marketing.

Know thy audience

The number one rule of marketing is to know your audience. When you know who you are speaking to, you'll know where to reach them, how to speak to them, and you won't waste your time and resources fishing around in the dark.

Make a quick list of things you know about your audience

Who are they? (Kids, families, young people, adults, elderly?).....

Where do they live? (Local to your event, regional, global?).....

Where do they go? (Shops, clubs, schools?) .....

What are their interests? (This'll help you search for Facebook groups they are involved in)

.....

What media are they engaged with? (Social media, email, local newspapers or radio, offline?)

.....

What else do you know about them that could help you communicate with them?

.....

Your marketing plan

Now you know your audience, let's put the plan into action. This is a rough guide, so make it your own, based on what you know about your event and audience.

8 weeks before your event

Create your graphics and start spreading the word

Here are a few initial tasks that can be ticked off by one person or the whole team

Firstly

- ☐ Create a Google Drive Folder and email the sharing link to your teammates

Create your graphics

- ☐ Create your event graphics. The aim is to be as clear and welcoming as possible. Head to Canva and create a simple series of graphics for your event. You'll want 3 or so different graphics, depending on what's relevant for your event.
    a. A square graphic for Facebook, Instagram and newsletters
    b. A poster (A4)
    c. A Facebook event banner, which you might be able to use in an event listing on your website too. Canva will know the most accurate template sizes that you'll need.
- ☐ Here's how to make your graphics:
    1. Create a free account on Canva, here.
    2. Click on 'Create a Design' in the top right-hand corner.
    3. Choose or search for 'Facebook Post (Square)'. You could choose other sizes/shapes, but a square will be most universal for other platforms.
    4. When your blank square pops up, go to the left-hand column where it says 'templates' and type the words 'community event' or whatever keywords are relevant to your event. A selection of templates will show up. Note: Some will have a small crown in the bottom right-hand corner, these ones aren't available for free.
    5. Click on one that you like, and you'll see it appear on your blank square. When you hover over any element it'll highlight and you can click on it to edit the design and details.

6. If there are elements in your design that have cross-hatching and the Canva watermark those are ‘Premium Elements’ and you won't be able to download your design watermark-free without upgrading to Pro. So if you need this to remain a free tool, delete them from the design and insert a new element which you can find under the ‘Elements’ tab on the far right.
7. Edit the words, colours, and design elements to suit your event.

Just remember: less is more. Keep your info to the point, because people have short attention spans.

Some important info that you could include:

a. The name of your event
b. The day and date
c. The open times
d. The location
e. Some basic info about what happens at the event
f. How to get tickets or if it’s free.
g. And your sponsors’ logos if you have them

8. Once your design is complete, click the ‘Share’ button at the top right. Click download. Either PNG or JPG are good options. Click download.
9. Find the file in your downloads folder and drop it into your Google Drive folder.
10. Repeat this process for the rest of the graphics you need. You can copy and paste the design element from the first design you made to the tab that has your new design, so you don’t have to reinvent the wheel.

Start sharing your event

Ok, it’s time to get your cool new graphics out into the world.

- [ ] If you have an events section on your community group website, make a new listing for your event with all the necessary information and the banner graphic you just created.

A good tip here is to use the website event listing that you created first as the source of all truth. (If you don't have a website you could use a Facebook event listing.) Then use that website link in all of your communications (email, posters, social media). If any details about your event change over the next few weeks, be sure to update your website first, then anyone seeing your older emails, social media posts or posters can click the web link to get the most up-to-date info.

- ☐ If you have a Facebook page, this is a good time to create a Facebook event. Here are the instructions.
- ☐ Post the square graphic to your Facebook Page, Facebook Group, and/or Instagram, and pin those to the tops of your feeds. Make sure you include the website event link that you just created to those posts and to your Instagram linktree. Make it super easy for any allies or sponsors to share your post by tagging them in it, especially Instagram Stories.
- ☐ Be sure you send your event info out to any email lists you have. Ie. you might already have an eNewsletter list. You might have a list of emails from a past event you hosted, a survey you've conducted or a competition or raffle you've held - usually you would collect email addresses during these processes, and if people have given their permission to send them promotional material, this is your chance! Email lists are super valuable because you get to send your info straight to people's inboxes.
- ☐ This also might be a good time to organise highway or roadside signs. Your council might be the best place to start that process.

An additional marketing strategy

While you're promoting your event you could run a raffle or a competition with the aim of collecting the email address in the process of those who enter. Then you'll have a list of email addresses belonging to people you know are interested in your event who you can directly market to via your email newsletter.

6 weeks before your event

Help your allies to promote your event to their audiences

This is probably the most important step in promoting your event as efficiently as possible. In this meeting, you'll be sending your event info out to as many places as you can think of in the hope that they'll promote your event to their audiences. Spreading the word far and wide, rather than waiting for people to stumble across your social media accounts to find the info.

Allow 2-3 hours to get together with your volunteer team, in person or via video conferencing.

You'll need

- ☐ 2 or 3 people with basic computer skills
- ☐ Your laptops
- ☐ Internet access
- ☐ Access to your online accounts and your Google Drive folder
- ☐ Cups of tea and good music

Divvy up the tasks

We find it works well when:

- ☐ One person takes research and spreadsheet admin
- ☐ One person takes emailing
- ☐ One person takes Facebook and/or Instagram communication (depending on current Facebook rules you may not be able to message other Facebook pages from your community Facebook page - so this might mean that the volunteer may need to be ok with using their personal profile for communications. If this is the case, be sure to say in your messaging that you are 'so and so', from 'your community group').

Get access + share your graphics

- ☐ Make sure everyone has access to what they need. Consider that you'll be sending out quite a few emails. Make sure you are using an email account that is owned by the community group or someone who is happy to receive replies and send back answers.
- ☐ Open your Google Drive folder, and ask your teammates to download the promo graphics that are saved there.

Write a message template

Write a template for the message you'll send out to your allies.

1. Menu click in the middle of the Google folder and choose 'Google Docs'.
2. Name the new document in the top left-hand corner.
3. Type out a succinct paragraph of info about your event. You'll send this passage to your allies.

Hot tip: make sure it's as easy as possible for your allies to share your event info. If your instructions aren't clear or they have to spend time writing out the info, they might not help you promote your event. If you are contacting larger organisations, like your local council, be sure to use their process for making contact - rather than emailing a busy employee and crossing your fingers.

4. Keep it short and sweet and add the website event link if you previously made one, or a Facebook event link.
5. Here's a template that you could use:

   Hello,
   We're emailing you to let you know about YOUR EVENT this MONTH.

   Can you help us spread the word by posting the following text and attached graphic to your Facebook Page and Newsletter?

   Here's the text you can use:

   YOUR EVENT is happening soon!

   List some highlights of your event.

   Day, date, time, and address.

   A touch more info about your event, ie, is it a fundraiser? What are you fundraising for? Do you have sponsors you'd like to mention?

   Your event website link or your event ticket link.

   Thank you for lending a hand, we really appreciate it.

6. Get your team to proofread it - they will all have access to it via your shared Google Drive folder.

Create a master spreadsheet to help you keep track

Create a master spreadsheet for your whole team to access. You'll use this to keep track of who you've sent your message out to, and how to get in contact with them - this info will be helpful for future events.

1. In your Google Drive folder and menu click in the middle of it. Choose 'Google Sheets'.

2. Name the spreadsheet in the very top left-hand corner.
3. Everyone in the team can now access the spreadsheet via the Google Drive folder and should open it up. You can all edit it live during the meeting.
4. Make some headings across the top. These are the ones we use:
    a. Group / Organisation Name
    b. Email (a space to paste in email addresses)
    c. Facebook Contact (a space to paste in Facebook Page/Group links)
    d. Instagram Contact (a space to paste in Instagram account links)
    e. Newsletter (Space for YES, NO or N/A - knowing this info will allow you to directly ask an ally to include your event in their newsletter)
    f. Posters (Space for TO DO or DROPPED OFF)
    g. Contacted at 6 weeks to go (you'll type 'FB' and 'Email' or whatever method you use to contact)
    h. Responded (here you'll type YES or NO, if your message was responded to, so next event you'll know who is more responsive than others, but note that some organisations and businesses may share your event, but not get back to your communication. So it still might be worth sending them a message about your next event.)
    i. Contacted at 1 week to go (ditto)

Who are your allies? It's time to brainstorm...

Everyone will have the spreadsheet open in front of them, it's time to fill it up with info. As you go make sure you look back at your notes about your audience, there will be clues there about who to add to this list. Here are the kinds of groups/places we add to our list:

- ☐ Online event listings - maybe your council or tourism organisation has a calendar of events that you could submit your event to.
- ☐ Library
- ☐ Schools
- ☐ Daycare centers
- ☐ Local council
- ☐ Radio stations (both community radio and local ABC station)
- ☐ Community newspapers and newsletters

- ☐ Sports clubs
- ☐ Local community groups (especially ones that have an active Facebook page or newsletter)
- ☐ Pharmacies and Post Offices
- ☐ Neighbourhood / Good Karma Facebook Groups (you may have to be a member of the group to post in the group. And you may be able to post your event straight to their group - but check on their group rules first, there may be rules around promotional posts.)
- ☐ Any people of influence who align with your event. Think: social media influencers or media personalities who work in the same space as you.
- ☐ All the stallholders or speakers (or people/businesses who are involved in your event)
- ☐ Friends, family, and colleagues.

Action stations

Copy the text template you wrote just before and the graphics you made, and send it all out to everyone on your list. Tick off each group as you go.

It's also handy to ask when any deadlines for school or club newsletters are. With this in mind, you might be able to sneak in another promo opportunity in the week leading up to your event.

Get a cuppa, put some music on, and go for it!

2-5 weeks before your event

A couple of optional tasks

A few additional tasks that will help spread the word even further.

Social media

Keep posting about your event to your own social media channels. You might find that you have new information to share, maybe a new stallholder or act has joined the line up? Have you got a raffle or competition that would enjoy some more air time? Make sure you always add the link to your website (the fount of all knowledge), or wherever the most up to date information is listed.

Make it super easy for any allies or sponsors to share your post by tagging them in it, especially Instagram Stories.

Doing a Facebook or Instagram 'Live' is a really great way to get in front of your audience. When you 'go live', your audience might get a notification and/or see you pop up at the top of their feed. You could do a Q&A, or a teaser of a workshop you'll be holding, or an interview with a speaker.

eNewsletter

Send out an eNewsletter to your mailing list with a reminder and any exciting updates.

Radio stations

Contact your local radio stations (especially community radio and your local ABC station) and pitch an interview idea. They are usually keen for interview ideas, but they'll want an angle. So think about your point-of-difference, something that sets your event apart. What's something unusual about it?

Newspapers

Your city newspaper might need about 2-3 weeks heads up for a story. And again think about an angle that they could write about.

Posters + flyers

Recruit a team of volunteers to put posters up in various locations (from your spreadsheet).

Follow up a week or 2 later to ensure the poster was put on display.

If you have the resources you could organise a letterbox drop in the local area if that's appropriate.

1 week before your event

A couple of tasks

Time to send a reminder to everyone you contacted from your spreadsheet. This will be a similar set of tasks to what you did at 6 weeks to go. Allow 2 hours to get together with your volunteer team again, in person or via video conferencing.

Hot tip: It's best to meet exactly a week, or within the week of your event, so that your messaging will be really clear. For example, you can say 'Our event is THIS weekend' - nice and punchy.

Write a new message template for your allies

- ☐ Open the Google document you made with your first template text.
- ☐ Duplicate what you initially wrote and adapt it to reflect that it's only 1 week until your event.
- ☐ Here's a template that you could use:

Hello,
We're emailing you again to let you know YOUR EVENT is happening this weekend!

(Right up the top here mention any new and exciting information you have about your event, like an exciting speaker or stallholder you've locked in. This will show the folk you are sending this to that this is relevant and exciting info.)

We'd really appreciate it if you could help us give our promotions one last push by posting the following text and attached graphic to your Facebook Page and Newsletter?

Here's the text you can use:

YOUR EVENT is happening this weekend!

List some highlights of your event.

Day, date, time, and address.

A touch more info about your event, ie, is it a fundraiser? What are you fundraising for? Do you have sponsors you'd like to mention?

Your event website or ticketing link.

Thank you for lending a hand, we really appreciate it.

- ☐ Open your spreadsheet.

- ☐ Divvy up the jobs again, and send out the text template and the graphics again to your list.
- ☐ Tick off each group as you go - making any relent notes in your spreadsheet that will make it easier for you next year.

Social media + eNewsletter

This is also a good opportunity to send your '1 week to go!' messaging out to your own social media audiences (don't forget to tag any allies and sponsors to encourage them to share your post) and eNewsletter list.

Share your post to any Facebook groups that are relevant to your event - don't forget to abide by their group rules.

On the morning of your event

A last-minute effort

Radio community event announcement

Our local ABC radio reads out texts on Saturday mornings from listeners who want to promote their community event - other stations might do the same. This is easy to do via the ABC Listen app.

Like before, you want to make it as easy as possible for the announcer to get your message out. So write your text as clearly, and make it an 'essential detail sandwich', which means start the text with the name of your event, the address, and the time. In the middle add some other short, but sweet details, and then end it with the same details that you started with, because people can't rewind the radio and may have missed the start of your text.

Social media

Post 'it's today' posts and stories to your social media - make sure you tag anyone likely to help you promote your event, like your sponsors, to make it easy for them to share it to their feed.

Doing a Facebook or Instagram 'Live' from your event is a good way to alert followers that your event is happening now. You could give them a tour of your event, interview a stallholder, show some live music or part of a workshop (with permission).

Survey event-goers

Actively or casually survey event-goers to ask how they heard about this event. This info might help you adapt your marketing plan for the next event.

Enjoy your event.

The week after your event

A moment of celebration and gratitude

It's great to take a moment after your event to celebrate it and thank your event-goers and sponsors with some photos posted to social media and/or an eNewsletter.

Thank you

Thank you for using this free Community Event Market Plan.

If you found it helpful or if you discovered something that worked really well for your event marketing that we didn't include, let me know. I'm passionate about helping grassroots community groups get their excellent ideas and events seen + would love to hear you're ideas.

www.nataliemendham.com.au

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This is an open source resource. An initiative that embraces community-oriented sharing of skills and resources - share widely and adapt for your own project.