

Media Plan Guideline for Attracting Participants to Educational Events

Version of July 5th 2024

Promoting educational events like hackathons or summer schools requires a well-thought-out media strategy to reach the right audience. Here is a simple guideline to help you attract participants.

1. Define Target Audience

- **Identify Audience Segments:** Determine the ideal participants—master or PhD students, early-career professionals, or specific groups like software developers, data scientists, or researchers in certain fields.
- **Tailor Messaging:** Customize your message for different segments. For example, emphasize learning opportunities for students, networking for early-career professionals, and innovation challenges for industry participants.

2. Leverage University Networks

- **Department Outreach:** Collaborate with academic departments, student organizations, and career centers at universities to directly promote the event through internal newsletters, bulletin boards, and student portals.
- **Faculty Endorsements:** Ask fellow professors or industry professionals associated with the event to promote it through their academic networks and classes, providing credibility and encouraging students to participate.

3. Social Media Campaigns

- **Platforms to Use:** Use LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to reach your target audience. Tailor content to each platform's audience. For example, post testimonials or case studies from past participants on LinkedIn, while using Instagram for visually appealing content like event highlights.
- **Hashtags & Tagging:** Use popular and relevant hashtags (e.g., #Hackathon, #SummerSchool, #STEM, #Innovation) to expand your reach. Tag relevant organizations, universities, or influencers to engage their followers.
- **Paid Advertising:** If budget permits, run targeted ads on social platforms, particularly LinkedIn and Facebook, aimed at university students or professionals interested in relevant fields.

4. Email Marketing

- **Build a Mailing List:** Utilize past participant lists, university mailing lists, and partnerships with relevant organizations to compile a database of potential attendees.
- **Send Targeted Emails:** Create email sequences that highlight event benefits (skills development, networking, prizes), deadlines, and application processes. Personalized or segmented email campaigns (e.g., for different regions or study fields) can yield better engagement.

5. Collaborate with Industry Partners

- **Corporate Sponsorships:** Partner with tech companies, startups, and industry organizations to co-promote the event. They may advertise it through their networks or sponsor prizes, which can attract more participants.
- **Cross-Promotions:** Offer to promote their events or initiatives in exchange for them sharing your event within their ecosystem of followers or users.

6. Engage Student Ambassadors

- **Appoint Ambassadors:** Select enthusiastic students or alumni to act as event ambassadors who can promote the event to their peers, both in-person and through their social networks.
- **Offer Incentives:** Provide small incentives, such as discounted registration or special perks, to student ambassadors who refer participants.

7. Create Compelling Content

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- **Video Promos:** Develop short promotional videos featuring highlights from past events, interviews with speakers, and testimonials from previous participants. Share these widely across social media, websites, and emails.
- **Event Website:** Ensure the event website is informative, visually appealing, and easy to navigate. Include details on how the event benefits participants, registration instructions, schedules, and past event successes.

8. Leverage Event Platforms

- **Event Listing Websites:** Post the event on educational and professional event platforms like Eventbrite, Meetup, Devpost (for hackathons), and other relevant websites that are frequented by your target audience.
- **Collaborate with Online Communities:** Engage with online communities and forums like Reddit, Discord groups, or specialized communities in fields related to the event to promote the opportunity to a niche audience.

9. Offer Early Bird Discounts or Referral Incentives

- **Early Registration Discounts:** Create urgency by offering early bird discounts to incentivize early sign-ups.
- **Referral Program:** Implement a referral system where participants who bring in additional attendees receive benefits such as discounts, exclusive access to workshops, or other perks.

10. Press and Blog Coverage

- **Reach Out to Bloggers and Journalists:** Connect with tech bloggers, educational influencers, or journalists who cover topics related to your event's theme. They can help promote your event to a larger audience.
- **Guest Blog Posts:** Write guest posts on academic or industry blogs, discussing the event and its value, which can drive traffic and interest.

Timeline Example

- **3-4 months before:** Launch website, start email outreach, and open social media accounts.
- **2-3 months before:** Begin social media posts, university outreach, and press release campaigns.
- **1 month before:** Send reminder emails, post video content, engage ambassadors, and start running any paid ads.
- **1-2 weeks before:** Final email push, social media countdown, and highlight event speakers or last-minute incentives.

By following these steps and engaging various channels, you can create a comprehensive media plan to effectively attract participants to your educational event.

This guideline is a living document and will be updated from time to time. If you have corrections, additions or ideas please let me know.

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