

Send in the SWOT team on attendance statistics

Understand your event's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats through the certified audit process

By Cynthia Edwards

Here is a type of audit that you can actually look forward to – one that renders a true picture of your event attendance. Whether you wish to promote your event as the biggest of its kind, or the one that attracts the most professionals in a certain industry; with a certified audit, you can know for sure – and so can your target market.

In 2005 the Exhibition and Event Industry Audit Commission (EEIAC) was organized for the purpose of managing and overseeing the exhibition industry's independent audit processes. This body offers standards for auditing business-to-business exhibitions and events and for business-to-consumer conventions and shows.

"We believe that exhibitors and sponsors deserve transparent and high-quality information about event attendance, so that they can make informed decisions about which events they will support," says Stephen Hacker, president of the International Association for Exhibition Management (IAEM).

Proof of ROI

When organizers are planning and budgeting for future strategic events, some of the key data they seek includes a breakdown of companies, industries represented and business titles among attendees. In the case of consumer shows, demographic data is of prime importance as well.

"We share this information – including the demographic details – with our exhibitors, to demonstrate their return on investment of our show," says HeidiAnne Werner, manager of event registration for the Consumer Electronics Association. "When anyone looks at the verified numbers from CES, they know that it is the actual number of attendees."

The Consumer Electronics Association has been relying on VERIS Consulting to conduct independent audits for the International Consumer Electronics Show since 1997. VERIS was recently certified by the EEIAC. Two other audit firms are also currently certified by the EEIAC: BPA Worldwide and Exhibit Surveys, Inc.

Steps to a good audit

There are two main steps in creating an accurate audit. Onsite, the audit company observes the registration process and tests the registration system. Post show, once all the data has been compiled, the audit company reviews each name on the registration roster. Their analysis eliminates duplicate names, verifies demographics data and reconciles the overall attendance lists.

According to Kelly Koenig, director of exhibit and sponsorship sales for Red 7 Media, LLC, "The process can be a bit tedious and time-consuming but the information we have seen thus far will be very useful to us in both the planning and selling process for the next event." Red 7 Media produces the FOLIO:Show for the publishing industry and is working with BPA Worldwide on their audit.

Why go through the trouble? Kelly says, "Having detailed, audited information is helpful for us to have a better understanding of our audience. It will ensure we produce an industry event that helps our customers, both exhibitors and attendees, make important business connections that can help them achieve their business goals."

PULL QUOTE:

I am hopeful that this information will help us convert new customers because this isn't "us" saying we deliver this audience, but a recognized and respected third party auditor. – *Kelly Koenig, Red 7 Media*

SIDEBAR:

Audit or not?

The Event Attendance Audit is an objective review by an independent and certified auditor of registration data to objectively confirm the number of Exhibit Only and paid Conference Delegates who actually attended an event. The report by the auditor summarizes the data. According to the EEIAC, there are several reasons why it is important to audit an event:

- 1) To ensure confidence in the audience numbers reported by the event organizer.
 - 2) To ensure consistency in how the numbers are audited.
 - 3) To help ensure your event objectives are realistic and achievable.
 - 4) To budget and plan more effectively.
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SIDEBAR:

The certification process

According to EEIAC procedures, a firm that wishes to participate in the industry-wide attendance certification program is obligated to apply for standing with EEIAC. Those who apply for certification must provide documentation as to their competence to perform independent audits; must agree in advance to conform to EEIAC published standards for the conduct of tradeshow or consumer event audits, and must provide copies of actual completed audits. Recertification is required each calendar year.

Cynthia Edwards is a freelance business writer based in Dallas, Texas. Contact her at writer@creative-word.com.