



# Your 2020 Guide to Attendee Acquisition

The proven digital marketing plan for maximizing attendance at your next event.

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Introduction:
The Ever-Changing
Landscape of
Event Marketing

If there's one constant in event marketing, it's *change*. Channels, offers, creative – what works in all of these core components of marketing is constantly in flux.

What "works" is also highly contextual. Each event must figure out its own marketing path, based upon the wants, needs and behaviors of its specific audience.

That being said, there have been some consistent trends in the evolution of event and attendee marketing, and the pillars of success have remained mostly the same: clearly communicate the value of your event, and make it easy for people to buy in.

In this guide, we're going to look at the channels, campaigns and tactics that are clearly winning out over others, and break down how you can make them work for your next event.

#### But first – remember the marketing funnel?

Before we get into specific channels, let's think about the process your attendees go through, from first learning about your event all the way through to purchasing a ticket. By thinking about your event marketing in terms of the journey that an individual attendee takes, you can actually create a more effective and personalized experience for *all* of your audience members.

The classic marketing funnel is a great way to think about this. It's a timeless concept that represents the ways that buyers make decisions, and it's split into three main stages: **awareness**, **engagement and conversion**.



Growing awareness is very different from driving registrations, and the channels and campaigns that work best for each goal are very different, too. That's why the best event marketers don't just use the right tools or channels – they align their campaigns to solve for *every* stage of the funnel.





Before we get into any specific campaigns, it's important to understand the basic flow of the marketing funnel and which channels are most effective for each stage.

#### **Awareness**

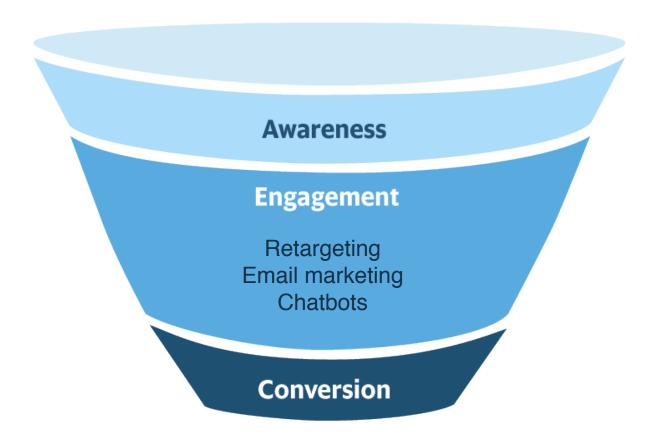
This is the uppermost stage of the funnel, and it's all about increasing brand awareness and building trust to expand your online audience. As you generate new prospective attendees, you can collect key data to target them with more personalized messaging in the next stages of the funnel.



Referral marketing gets you in front of new, qualified audiences, and the right software can digitize that process to help you more efficiently leverage your partnerships and drive awareness. Paid search and paid social along with programmatic channels like geofencing put your event in front of the most relevant prospects with compelling ads that drive people through to your event page.

#### **Engagement**

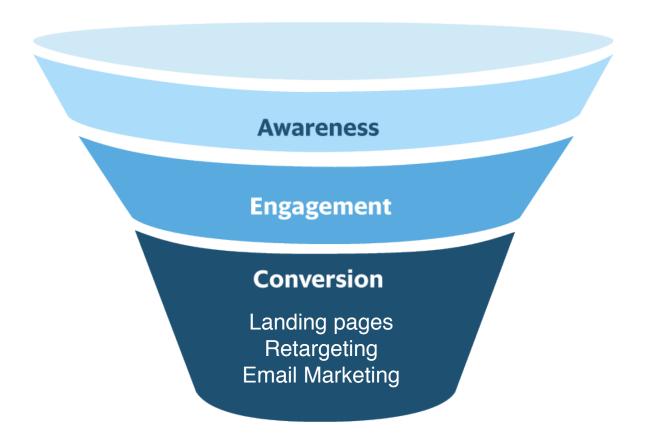
This stage is a great opportunity to develop a relationship with your new prospects and solidify your brand's positioning. Prospects are ready to learn more about your event so they can make informed decisions, so you should engage them with content that is more targeted around specific topics.



Retargeting lets focus your advertising on people who've indicated high levels of interest in your event, which makes it a super-efficient channel for engagement. Email marketing is also a great channel for reaching prospective attendees in a highly personalized way, with nurture campaigns that keep people engaged over time and drive them back to your site. Then, further engage site visitors with chatbots to answer their questions and gather key information so you can further personalize your messaging.

#### Conversion

Once a prospect gets to this stage of the funnel, they're ready to make a decision – and it's up to you to hit that sweet spot between informative and persuasive. You should use channels that efficiently answer any questions a prospect might have about your event while also motivating them to make a decision.



Landing pages are the real MVP in the conversion stage. Create different pages with customized messaging and calls to action, and drive each audience segment to the right page to maximize registrations. Retargeting and email marketing continue to play key roles in this stage of the funnel, allowing you to run cart-abandonment campaigns and more to ensure that no potential attendees fall off your radar.

Now that we've looked at which channels work best for each funnel stage, let's delve a little deeper into how they work and how you can leverage them to get more attendees.





The marketing funnel naturally narrows out, so if you're not feeding enough leads into the initial stage, you won't have many conversions (i.e., event attendees) coming out at the end. Let's discuss the channels you should use in the awareness stage to attract the most qualified leads and move them through to the next stages of the funnel.

# **Referral Marketing**

You'd probably agree that word-of-mouth is the best marketing channel all around – high conversion rate of leads to customers, shorter sales cycles, high customer retention rates. The problem is that it's not a channel you can directly or easily impact with marketing dollars.

But there are some ways to use technology to increase word-of-mouth marketing for your events, and it starts with leveraging one of your most powerful assets: your relationships with partners and attendees.

#### **Partner** Referral Marketing

Your event partners consist of speakers, exhibitors and sponsors, all of whom have their own audience members who are prime leads for your event since they're already loyal to or interested in a brand that's affiliated with you. If you can get those brands to actively promote their involvement in your events, you'll be getting valuable exposure to hundreds or thousands of new, highly qualified prospective attendees.

With the right platform, you can run a digital referral program that automatically creates custom promotional materials – like landing pages, emails and banner ads –

for each partner, highlighting them as a premier contributor to your event. When you provide them with collateral that's nice-looking and easy to share, they'll be much more willing to help spread the word.

\*Pro tip: You can up the ante by offering specific incentives for partners to share the collateral – for example, a discount on booth or sponsorship costs for the partner who helps drive the most registrations.



#### **Attendee** Referral Marketing

Attendees can also be powerful influencers in a space, so partnering up with the right ones can be another great way to spread the word about your event. If one of your attendees has an audience of followers that could benefit from coming to your event, try working with them to get in front of some new prospects.

You can provide these influencers with all of the same types of custom marketing materials that you create for other partners, and some incentives to participate could include free admission for the influencer or other perks, like allowing them to offer a discount code to any of their followers who register to attend.

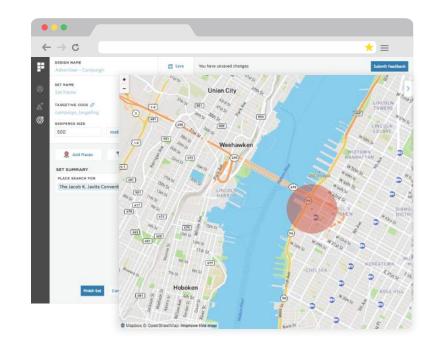
# **Programmatic Advertising**

In a nutshell, "programmatic" refers to using software to buy and display digital advertising, rather than doing it through human negotiations or other traditional processes. It's a super-efficient way to get your event in front of tons of new, qualified prospects wherever they are on the web, and you can leverage it throughout every stage of the marketing funnel.

For the awareness stage, there are a few types of programmatic advertising that are very impactful: **geofencing**, **email mapping**, **and lookalike modeling**.

### Geofencing

Geofencing enables marketers to target ultra-specific physical locations with their advertising. We're talking neighborhoods, city blocks, university campuses – all the way down to a specific building or street address. If you've got a pulse on the powerful players and events in your industry, geofencing is a powerful yet simple way to put your message in front of new, qualified audiences.



#### Here are some easy geofencing campaigns you can run before your next event:

- ✓ Geofence a competing event. Run an awareness campaign during the dates of that event, geofencing the exact address of the event's venue. This way, your competitor's attendees will see your message as they're browsing the web during the event and since they're already in career development mode, they will be more open to learning about similar events and opportunities.
- Geofence potential exhibitors. If there's a brand you want to land as an exhibitor, target their headquarters with a highly personalized ad campaign making them aware of your event and the value they would get from partnering up with you.

#### **Email Mapping**

Most of the time, emailing people about your upcoming event isn't enough to get them there. Email mapping lets you engage your existing contacts in a new way by showing them ads, rather than just hitting their inbox a couple times a month.

Simply upload an email list of prospective attendees to your digital marketing platform, and it will crawl the web to match cookies for as many of those contacts as possible. Then, you can start retargeting them with ads across the web to drive them back to your event page and nurture them toward registering.

#### **Lookalike Modeling**

This is a great way to find more attendees and prospects like the ones you've already won over. Lookalike modeling analyzes your existing audience according to its digital traits and then expands upon it to deliver you with new, similar prospects you can start targeting across the web.



# **Paid Search**

Paid search works by showing your ads to people who have searched for any number of terms related to your event. The more compelling your ads are, the more people will click through to learn about your event.

Once they visit your website, they enter into your tracked audience, which means you can then start retargeting them with more personalized ads to engage and nurture them toward registering for your event.

#### Here are some tips to get started with paid search:

- When it comes to keywords, don't get too specific too quickly. Start by thinking about the broadest topics or ideas related to your event.
- Rank those topics by their relevance to your event. In other words, think about how "sales-ready" someone searching for that topic would be.
- Input each of the topics into a tool like Google's Keyword Planner to get a full list of related keywords that you can target.
- Select your top 10 keywords for each of your best topics, and enter them into the corresponding ad groups for those topics.

\*Pro tip: Try to balance the amount of competition and the bid range to determine which keywords to prioritize. If you see a low-competition term with a low bid price that's relevant to your event, grab it while you can.

# **Paid Social**

Paid social lets you target individuals across high-performing social platforms based on their gender, age, location, industry, likes, interests and more, allowing you to create highly qualified audience segments that you can market to.

With social advertising, you can display visual ads (rather than just text-only ads), and you can allow people to comment on and like your ads, all of which helps increase interaction and click rates.

And the best part? Paid social is significantly underpriced in the advertiser's favor, so it's actually a lot more affordable than you might think.

#### Here are a couple of campaign ideas to get started:

- Drive awareness about your event by targeting an audience of professionals in your industry, further filtered by title, with ads highlighting the overall value of your event.
- Target a lookalike audience\* of your website visitors to drive net new traffic to your event page.
  - \* A lookalike audience is one that "resembles" a specific audience, like your site visitors, in terms of demographic and behavioral profiles.





Now that you've put all this work into growing your audience of prospective attendees, your priority is to keep them engaged long enough for them to make a decision. Most people won't sign up for your event the first time they hear about you, **but they will if they** *keep* **hearing from you.** 

# Retargeting

What if you could spend 100% of your ad budget marketing to people who are interested in your event? With a retargeting tool, you can.

Retargeting outperforms all other forms of display advertising, and here's why: The people seeing your ads have already expressed some level of interest in your event by visiting your site. They're warm leads who are significantly more receptive to your marketing than a general audience would be, and as a result, your ad budget becomes incredibly efficient.

#### How retargeting works:

- 1. When someone visits your site, a tracking pixel (or cookie) is dropped on their device to track things like:
  - Which pages they visited on your site
  - · How many times they've come to your site
  - · What kind of device they're using
- 2. After the visitor *leaves* your site, that cookie allows you to follow them across the web and display your ads to them on other sites they're browsing, which guarantees that you're putting your message in a place they'll actually see it.

Let's say, for example, that you geofenced a competing event with ads that drove people to your event registration page. Any unknown leads who clicked on one of those ads immediately became tracked leads. In other words, someone you didn't even know existed yesterday is now a qualified member of your audience, and you have access to market to them all over the web with ads encouraging them to go back to your site and register for your event.

#### Personalize, Personalize!

Engagement is the most nuanced stage of the funnel in terms of what people want from you. Some know next to nothing about your event, some understand the value but need more convincing – and some might have even been to your events in the past.

No matter what, the key to effective engagement is truly knowing your audience members. Why are they interested in your event? Where did they find out about you? How often are they engaging with your online content? Basically, it's about knowing what sets them apart from *each other* so you can customize your messaging to speak to their individual needs.

Luckily, retargeting is built for this type of segmentation, since it's all about tracking people's online behavior. Here are some retargeting campaigns that can help you engage prospective attendees:

Save the date. This is a great way to ensure maximum registration even before you have all of the event details nailed down. If you know the date and location, you can start showing ads to get on people's radars.



- Registration open. Let people know as soon as they can start registering for your event by retargeting them with ads that drive them to your reg page. The more advance notice people have, the more likely they'll be able to attend.
- Early-bird discount. You can build this messaging into your overall Registration Open campaign, or you can offer this discount to people who've visited specific pages on your site. Either way, the goal is to create a sense of urgency and get as many registrants as possible in the early days of promoting your event.



✓ Announce speakers or sessions. Once you lock down these details, you can create teaser ads that drive people to a page where they can register, see your speaker lineup and even sign up for sessions.

# **Email Marketing**

With modern email marketing systems, you can set up rules that, when triggered, automatically send emails to the individuals who triggered those rules. You can pick essentially any trigger – a form submission or interaction, a website visit, an email click – and then send out any email you create based on what the action was.

In the engagement stage of the funnel, you can use email automation in a lot of the same ways you can use retargeting. For example, you could send an email to your contacts announcing that event registration is open, and if they visit the reg page but leave without signing up, that can trigger a second email offering the early-bird special.

Like retargeting, email is a great tool for keeping your audience engaged during their decision-making process – but it's important to follow best practices so you don't come across as spammy.

Here are some tips for getting more out of email marketing when promoting an event:

- Make your emails mobile-friendly. Don't miss out on potential attendees just because they can't read your email. Use a platform that offers responsive email templates that adapt to fit any screen size, and always take a minute to preview your email on a mobile device before sending.
- Include clear, compelling CTAs. Remember that most readers are only skimming your emails, so you have to make your main message really stand out. Opt for a button over a hyperlink, use a color that stands out from the rest of the email, and keep CTA copy down to two or three words.

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**Segment your audience.** Just like with retargeting, when you show your audience members you know who they are, they'll be much more likely to turn into attendees. You can segment your audience based on industry, title, location, interests, behavior, etc., and then customize your email outreach to be more relevant to each list.

# **Chatbots**

All of the channels we've discussed so far are designed around one common goal: driving people to your website. So what happens next? You need to engage people while they're on your site, with two specific goals in mind:

- Answering their questions and providing them with information to help them decide if they're interested in your event
- 2. Identifying their specific needs and concerns so you can use those insights to further personalize your marketing outreach

Chatbots are a highly effective way to do both of these things. You might be familiar with using chatbots to sell tickets or act as a "personal assistant" for attendees during an event – but they're also becoming a popular tool for event marketers to capture and engage audience members.

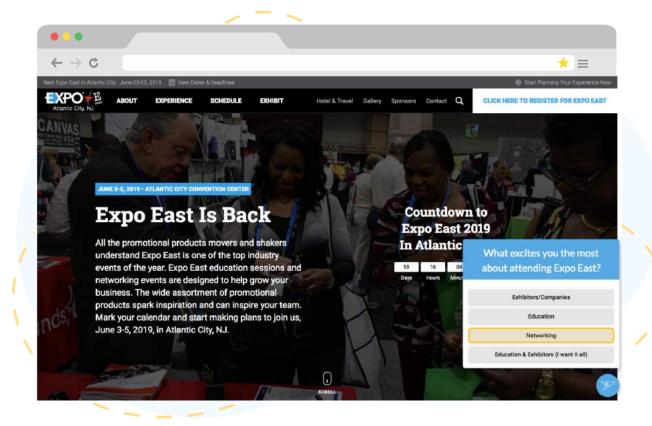
With a chatbot, you can automate the questions, responses and follow-up actions that you deliver to your web visitors, making it much more personalized than standard website chat.

For example, if someone specificies that they're interested in networking, you can automatically:

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Start showing them retargeting ads with messaging related to the networking opportunities that your event offers

- Add them to an email drip campaign that features who will be at the event, including speakers, influencers, and other attendees
- Send them to another page that highlights the networking opportunities at your event, like happy hours, parties, special sessions and more



The same goes for any other concerns or interests a prospect might have. If someone lives near the event location, you can focus your outreach around convenience. If they live far away, highlight some of the cool things about the location and offer advice or deals on accommodations.

And the list goes on. When you integrate chatbots into your campaigns, you can segment your web traffic into more useful buckets and deliver more personalized messaging to each visitor – increasing engagement and ultimately driving more registrations.



By this point, you've put a lot of time and energy into bringing qualified leads to your site and narrowing down what they need from you. But that web traffic is only valuable if you **convert it into registrations**, so let's talk about the key channels that can help you do this.

# **Landing Pages**

Up until the very moment someone registers for your event, you have to remind them exactly what's in it for them – who is exhibiting, who is speaking, how many accreditation points they can earn, how much it costs, where to stay.

The sweet spot is to give visitors all of the information they need and none that they don't, based on the interests they've displayed through responding to your ads, emails or chatbots.

That's exactly what landing pages are for. While homepages tend to bombard visitors with menus and information, and registration pages are often too bare-bones, a properly designed landing page will include the exact information needed to drive responders from a campaign through to one particular action, in this case registration.

For instance, if someone is looking to fulfill a requirement for work, use your ads and emails to direct them to a landing page highlighting the professional development opportunities your event offers. Allow people to register directly on that page, or make it seamless for them to get to your main reg page, always keeping focused on the benefits of attending.

Landing page builders have recently become popular timesaving tools for marketers. They make it easy to guickly create beautiful, high-converting pages without any need for a developer.



#### Here are some best practices for designing landing pages that convert:

- Pack maximum value at the top of the page, including your primary call to action, so people will get the point even if they don't keep scrolling.
- Make sure to tie your messaging clearly back to the campaign that drove people to this page in the first place. One way is to make the page header match the text on the ad or email they just clicked.
- Include multiple calls to action so people can easily take the next step from wherever they are on the page.

# **More Retargeting**

Yep, you got it – retargeting doesn't stop just because someone is engaging with you. It's also a vital tool for getting people to cross the finish line, whether that means going back to complete a registration form they abandoned, or committing to your event in some other tangible way if registration is free.

Here are some retargeting campaigns you can run to drive conversions:

# **Cart-Abandonment Campaigns**

Visiting your registration page is one of the clearest signs that someone wants to attend your event. Set up a segment of people who've visited that page, and retarget them with ads reminding them about your event and driving them back to the page to complete their registration.



#### **Drive-In Campaigns**

One group that is frequently overlooked is the people who live within driving distance of your event. The barrier of entry is much lower for them, since they don't have to pay for air travel and lodging, so advertising to them can be an easy win. With retargeting, you get access to basic geographical information on your site visitors, which you can use to set up a campaign to target people who live in the area of your event.

#### **Anti-Attrition Campaigns**

Getting people to register is the main battle, but ensuring they actually *show up* is paramount – especially if you don't charge for registration. The trick is to get people to make micro-commitments, like booking their lodging or travel, which you can do by running ads that highlight discounts on hotels, plane tickets and more.

You can also run a campaign that encourages people to download your event app. This is a double whammy, since downloading the app is a strong indicator of attendance, plus you can communicate directly through the app to continue offering deals and incentives.

# **Aaand... More Email Marketing**

When it comes to the conversion stage, you can think about email marketing in much the same way as retargeting. The primary goal is **to get people to make a decision**, and your emails should provide that final nudge.

In addition to running retargeting ads around cart abandonment, you can set up automated emails for the same purpose. If someone visits your reg page but then bails, this can trigger an email that goes out 30 minutes later encouraging them to go back and complete the form.

The same goes for other conversion efforts. You can send emails offering discounts to people for whom price is a barrier. You can run anti-attrition email campaigns offering hotel discounts or encouraging people to book 1:1 meetings with people who will be at the event.





Event marketing is a year-round exercise, so take a minute to celebrate how successful the event was, then get right back to it so you don't fall off of anyone's radar. If you do this part right, more attendees will come to your next event, and people who didn't make it this time will appreciate your continued engagement and be more likely to attend next time.

#### Here are a few ideas for post-event marketing campaigns:

- ✓ Post-event survey. Surveys are an effective way to get ideas for improving your next event, and they also show attendees you're invested in their experience. Ask attendees to rate the quality of the workshops, speakers, food, venue and consider offering an incentive, like a discount code, to boost participation.
- Recap videos. Create highlight videos to instill nostalgia in attendees and show people who didn't attend exactly what they missed. Videos are also a great way to promote your next event, so capture as much as you can and convert it into something you can share.
- Personalized thank-you. Use your email marketing platform to send attendees a thank-you message personalized with their name and any other relevant relevant details. You can even message people who didn't attend, saying that you know things can get busy but hope they'll come next time.
- Social media contest. This can be as simple as a funny photo or caption contest. Just ask participants to include the event hashtag, and this turns into user-generated content that organically promotes your event among relevant audiences.







Aligning your marketing campaigns with the right funnel phase helps you create the most personalized experience for a lead at any given time. But people are constantly moving through some sort of funnel, even if they're a loyal customer or they attended your last event.

Always try to think about your audience members in terms of the next step you want them to take, and then align your marketing or upsell efforts to match where they are in their journey. Leverage a variety of tools and campaigns to create a truly omni-channel marketing strategy that gets people engaged and excited about attending your next event.

