

Sponsoring an Event:
It's as Easy as 1-2-3 -- or Is it?
By Nadiyah Vahdahty © 2005

Many years ago, when I owned a New Age/ Alternative health store, many people would stroll through it and comment, "I could do this." Fast forward to the present, and I hear the same comment as a special event concludes.

Yes, there are many that 'could do this,' but what does 'doing this' entail? To help you consider if hosting events is an appropriate action to take, I've provide three things to consider: objectives, customers, and risk.

First, what are you trying to accomplish?

- A) Recognition?
- B) Glamour?
- C) Money?
- D) Instruction?
- E) A chance to mingle with a star?
- F) An opportunity to perform?
- G) _____ ?

Success can only be measured if you have first determined your objective. *Recognition* has its rewards, especially when climbing the ladder of fame. Even so, recognition is contingent on whether the event is successful or if you have had enough successful events to outweigh the unsuccessful events. Furthermore, "successful events" are defined by your peers, your customers, and your overall market.

Glamour is enticing. It is certainly thrilling to see your name on a reader board, to wear an evening gown and stage make-up, and to have all eyes held upon you. But can you speak in front of a group? Can you lighten up a tense crowd? Can you problem solve in a split second? Can you continue to smile and cheer on the performers even when it feels as if you've been cursed? Glamour will only last as long as you deliver a first-rate show. The audience doesn't want any excuses; they want to be entertained. If they pay you with their time and/or money, they expect a fair exchange.

Money can only be gained if your revenues exceed your expenses. Some of the major expenses you'll need to consider are facilities rental, equipment rental or purchases (e.g. sound system, lighting system, tables and chairs), insurance, instructor's fees (e.g. performance, instruction, flight, hotel), and advertising. Many contracts require a deposit or a full payment in advance, so determine your budget and available capital before signing the initial contract.

Instruction is why I started sponsoring events. I admired an instructor, her teaching techniques, her seemingly sincere attitude, so I invited her to teach two workshops. Bringing in an instructor can get quite expensive, so make sure the instructor teaches your desired style, delivers your desired curriculum, and meets your teaching expectations.

As the hostess/host, you may not be able to enjoy the workshops. Details, such as a broken thermostat, a need to move vendor tables or find a first-aid kit, can quickly consume the time. If instruction is your main objective, then note that there is the chance that you may not be able to receive it.

A chance to mingle with the 'star' can be hit or miss as well. The star instructor's flight may arrive/depart right when you must be elsewhere, such as an interview with the media. Or the event's schedule may be so tight, that the instructor has barely enough time to return to her hotel room, eat, and change. Sometimes, she/he might be recovering from the flu or jet lag, or feels the need to replenish herself/himself with solitude before or after the performance. Additionally, others want the chance to mingle with the star and will vie for her attention.

An opportunity to perform can be had in much simpler and inexpensive means. Neighborhood fairs, city events, non-profit fund raising events, school programs, and other outside sources provide plenty of opportunities to perform. If you are not concerned with receiving pay for performance, then check with the different non-profits in your area. Many would love to receive your performance services free of charge.

Determine your main objectives and use these as criteria in your planning process. Be aware of the benefits and obstacles associated with the objectives and look for ways to enhance or minimize as needed. Knowing the possible constraints of specific objectives can make it much easier to manage unexpected situations.

Next, who is your primary customer base?

- A) Absolute beginners?
- B) Intermediate to advanced dancers?
- C) Dancers of all levels?
- D) Professionals?
- E) Hobbyists?
- F) Females?
- G) Males?
- H) Adults or all ages?
- I) Anyone who notices?

Your promotional campaign will be most cost-effective if you determine your target market before you approach your possible markets. Marketing to already established dancers is far different than marketing to ladies who've never been exposed to the art. Similarly, marketing to adults is much different than marketing to the youth. Niche marketing calls for strategy and knowing your customers whereas mass marketing requires much additional funds. Marketing your event is essential, and knowing who is your main customer base can help you stay focused and save possibly \$\$ thousands.

When considering your customer, also consider your instructor. Who will benefit the most from her/his instruction? Is your instructor comfortable teaching that level, that

gender, etc.? Does she know this is your target market? Is she/he aware of your intentions before the handouts are made and the music is prepared? In addition to fitting the instruction with the customer, communicating with your instructor about your target base may lead to further market opportunities as well. She/he may have great insights about her/his particular style and the types of customers she/he tends to draw.

Finally, how much are you willing to risk?

- A) Financially?
- B) Time?
- C) Emotionally?

There is much more than dollars at stake. Time and emotional stress can get quite costly. The extended hours and emotions can take a toll, especially if someone tries to sabotage your event. Even without the needless strife, many folks require one to two weeks to 'wind down' after hosting an affair.

Although I've touched on the down side of hosting affairs, hosting events can be quite fulfilling. I've met some wonderful ladies and gents, I've received top notch training from master instructors who've regularly performed in the Middle East, and I've got to experience the sense of family within the belly dance community. As with any business, careful planning is most essential and all aspects, the good and the bad, must be considered.

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