Guide to a Successful Meetup Group & Meetup Events

By: William Petz

About Will Petz & Random Events

In March 2009, Will Petz started the "Adventure, Activities and Random Events" Meetup Group, also known as "Random Events". In 2 1/2 years Random Events has achieved: 7,000+ members, 200+ Meetup Events, and holds a 5 star rating given by its members "event seekers". Because of the unique events hosted ranging from: classes, presentations, social gatherings, and outdoors; Will has a great deal of experience organizing a wide range of meetup events.

When Will is not hosting Meetup Events he returns to his suit and tie day job. He has been a mobility/project manager at five major investment banks, in which he currently holds the title of Vice President of mobile communications. Some of Will's personal achievements have been the following: co-author of "The BlackBerry All-in-One for Dummies", co-developed a patent-pending BlackBerry Enterprise Server monitoring application, visited 40+ countries, CPR and PADI Scuba Diver Certified, as well as the writer of the "Guide to a Successful Meetup Group & Meetup Events" which you are about to read.

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To learn more about Random Events, visit: www.RandomEventsNY.com

"Random Events is the key to opening the city's potential" – Nick (Random Events Member)

"Random Events does an excellent job of bringing people of all backgrounds together… " – Michelle Z (Random Events Member)

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CHEAT SHEET

Don't have time to read the entire guide? Don't worry I provided the key points to remember for each section of this guide. To get more information including, tips, tricks and step by step instruction, feel free to jump the section of your choice.

3 WEEKS BEFORE

1) Plan to schedule a new Meetup Event.
2) Search for ideas from other Meetup Groups, members' ideas, local papers and websites.
3) Select a format style: Activity, class, networking, support, presentation, etc…
4) Find and pick the right venue for your Meetup Event.
5) Preparing for the Meetup Event: Strategy for posting and charging members.

2 WEEKS BEFORE

1) Creating your Meetup Event: Fill out each field appropriately: title, location, image, etc…
2) Develop a standard template for the description all your Meetup Events.
3) Get people to sign up early to your Meetup Event: Friends, Family, Meetup Group members, etc…
4) Promote your Meetup Event: Printed material and online resources such as: Facebook, Twitter, Craigslist, etc…

1 DAY BEFORE

1) Contact the venue you will have the Meetup Event to confirm they are expecting you.
2) Contact your assistant organizers and the "Yes" and "Maybe" RSVP's with any last minute details; include your contact information and reminders of items to bring if necessary.
3) Review responses to any questions and print out the attendee summary to check people in at the Meetup Event.
4) Prepare all the items you will need and have it ready for tomorrow: Name tags, signs for people to find you, camera, directions, etc..

DAY OF THE MEETUP EVENT

1) Leave early, get to the Meetup Event location at least 30 minutes early.
2) Start your Meetup Event on time!
3) When members arrive: Greet them, take attendance, have an ice-breaker to have them start socializing with others.
4) Take pictures and videos.
5) Say goodbye and thank them for coming out.

AFTER THE MEETUP EVENT

1) Edit RSVP's for those that did not attend.
2) Post pictures and upload videos.
3) Send a follow up email and include: a thank you, links to the pictures and videos, and acknowledgements to anyone who helped out.
4) Read comments that members posted about the Meetup Event and the venue.
5) If money was involved, update the money module within Meetup's Site.

GETTING TO KNOW THIS GUIDE

Congratulations, you've started a Meetup Group; now let's plan a Meetup Event! This guide is intended for new and existing Meetup Organizers. It will help you to create and host a

successful Meetup Event. I have divided this guide into four sections: Ideas to create a Meetup Event, things to do before, during, and after a Meetup Event. Each section includes the top five things you need to get started, which is then explained in detail.

What do these icons mean?

The Random Events Logo will provide real life experiences from me and other organizers.

I don't know everything and would love to get your feedback, so if you have a suggestion to make this guide better or to include something that I may have missed, feel free to send it to me: Guide@randomeventsny.com and include your Meetup group link and I will provide a thank you section at the end.

The question mark indicates items like: How to, tips for using Meetup.com, statistics, information, and navigation using Meetup.com

Before We Get Started

At this point we expect that you may have already created your Meetup Group page, designed a snazzy theme, and had some members join, so you are all set to plan some great Meetup Events and start having fun. Don't worry if you haven't done this yet, we will provide some tips that will help you get this all set up. Okay, let's get started!

Having an **attractive Meetup site is important.** If you don't have the creative ability to do this yourself, consider getting help. Puppetdesignny.com is a site that is inexpensive and can create amazing looking Meetup Group Themes, Logos, Youtube pages, flyers and other items to promote your Meetup Group.

When you set up your group, you were asked to choose topics that relate to your group. After creating your group, Meetup.com will send a broadcast message three days before, to all of Meetup members that have subscribed to that topic about your new group. This will be one of your **biggest opportunities to get new members.**

THREE WEEKS BEFORE - Planning for a new Meetup Event

Regardless if it's your first or 134th Meetup Event, unless you auto-schedule the same Meetup Event over and over again, you will have to think of something new and exciting to get members to come out and participate. Once figure out what to do, the next challenge is to figure out how to structure it, to find a place to host it, putting it all together and then posting it so people can join. **Taking the time to plan it out beforehand will save you time, money** and ensure that your Meetup Event runs smoothly. Here are some things that will help you brainstorm:

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The Top 5 things you need to know BEFORE YOU SCHEDULE your Meetup Event

1) Getting ideas for your next Meetup Event.
2) Choosing a format that works for you.
3) Picking the right venue.
4) Finding you a venue using.
5) Planning your strategy for your next Meetup Event.

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Getting Ideas for your Next Meetup Event

If you are like so many other organizers, you may find it hard to think of different Meetup Events to schedule for your Meetup Group. Here are a few ways to help you find topics and ideas of Meetup Events that you could schedule:

It is difficult sometimes to think of ideas of Meetup Events to host, but do your best. Without adding any more pressure to planning out your first Meetup Event, you should consider the following: **keep one or two Meetup Events on your calendar, it shows everyone that the group is active**. It helps attract new members and keep existing ones.

Existing Meetup Groups: Search other Meetup Groups that are similar to yours. Look at their current and past events that they have posted. Use their Meetup Events for ideas to host your own. Be original, don't copy theirs, but use it brainstorm ideas. You should also look at the specific Meetup Event's rating and member turnout is. This will help you to help gauge how successful your own Meetup Event might be for the same Meetup Event. Obviously there are many different factors that may make one group's event more successful than another's, even if it's the same topic (number of members in the group, time and day of week, location, cost, etc. all play a factor in your Meetup Events turnout).

When searching for similar groups make sure to try different search terms. For example if you run a mommy's Meetup Group try searching for these terms: Mom, Mothers, Mommy, Baby, Babies, etc.

Don't just search local Groups! By default when you search for a Meetup Group, it searches groups within 25 miles of your location that you have set in your profile. Change the location to a big city like New York, Chicago or some other city that may have what you are looking for. To change your search location, from the main page click "Find a Meetup Group" and in the "City or ZIP/postal code" field type in the other location. See Figure 1 below.
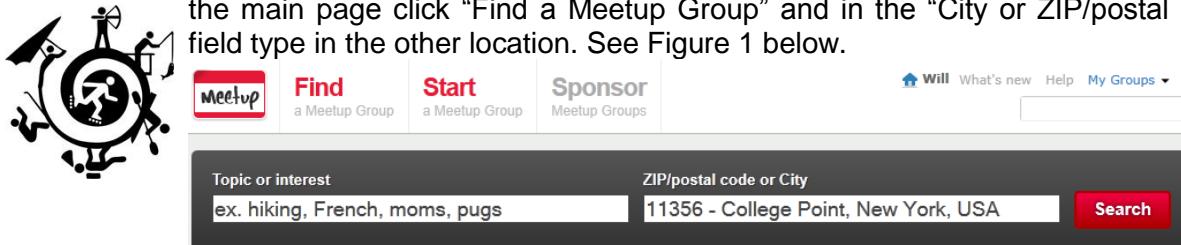
Figure 1: Find a Meetup Group. Change "Zip\Postal code or City" to search other locations

Ask members of your group: Members in the group signed up to your Meetup Group because they are interested in it. They may have some great ideas for things to do, so don't hesitate to reach out to them for suggestions. Don't worry; you don't have to use their ideas. The two most popular ways to reach out to the members in the group are:

Email the group:
      1) From your Meetup Groups main page click "Group Tools"
      2) Choose "Email members"
Encourage posting of ideas on a discussion board:
      1) From your Meetup Groups main page click "Group Tools"
      2) Choose "Group Settings"
      3) Choose "Optional Features"
      4) Under "Meetup options", "Communication" and enable "Message board"
      5) Start a discussion "What do you want to do"

Don't be upset if you ask a question and members don't respond. In the "Random Events" Meetup Group of 7000+ members, only one or two people will respond back to a question (seriously). Keep in mind that members do get many other emails. Use Meetup's "Email Members" feature as little as possible, so members don't feel like they are getting SPAM from you.

Local magazines, newspapers, and websites: You can use local magazines and newspapers as resources to find ideas to create a Meetup Event.   Some of these publications highlight things to do around your neighborhood, new businesses and other stuff that may be of interest to your group. You could also check online at timeout.com, craigslist.com, yelp.com, your city's website or the website of your favorite venue.

Understanding Some of the Different Formats Styles

There are many different ways you can run a Meetup Event. Some Meetup Groups meet and talk in a circle, others run them like a class room with a teacher and students, some may just have members mingle and talk, and others could try a combination of several styles. You have to choose which the best format for your group and your specific Meetup Event. Here is a list of some common format styles you can choose from:

- Activity/Group Project
- Class/Workshop
- Interview
- Presentations
- Playgroup
- Support Group
- Social/Happy Hour
- Meet and Greet

Remember regardless of the format you choose, make sure to give everyone attention. Members will notice that you do your best to engage everyone and will appreciate the effort you are making to do so. Everyone wants to feel like part of a group/team/family and by socializing with everyone, they will get that feeling and want to return for your future events.

Activity/Group Project

Create some activity that can get several people working together on. Make a jig saw puzzle, building a bike or a ginger bread house. Make sure that the activity is easy enough so everyone will be able to do it. The picture to the right is everyone making pasta

Activity formats really help to **build social interaction**. As the organizer, make sure that everyone is being engaged in the activity, even if that means you need to stop doing it to help them out. Members will appreciate that you go out of your way to get everyone evolved. This will help bring members back for future events.

Class/Workshop

There are so many classes out there like dancing, cooking, baking, how to play golf, arts and crafts or even juggling like the below picture. Ask your group if anyone has a skill that they can teach; you'll be amazed at what talented people you have in your group.

Don't forget that most members that come to this type of format style are there to **learn and to socialize**. Think about spending 30 minutes playing an icebreaker game to introduce everyone. Also take 30 minutes after the class/workshop to have an open discussion or something else that promotes interaction with the members in the group.

Presentations

Just like in school and at work, presentations are a great way to get across a message, teach or train and sometimes entertain people.

Yawn… Sorry did you say something? When I host presentations I try to be fun and engaging. Don't just talk and show a slide show. Figure out different ways to **get the members in the group involved** with the presentation. Ask questions, act scenarios out, add props, comedy and even audio and visual effects, help keep their attention and stop them from falling asleep.

Show and Tell

Everyone loves showing off stuff that they have. So what do you think about organizing a Meetup Event that has either a theme to it or just random items for people to bring and talk about.

Depending on how many people and how long your Meetup Event is, plan out how many minutes each person could have so that everyone has time to speak. Have someone keep time and provide a 1 minute warning to the speaker. Do your best to **make sure the person stops talking when their time is up.** Don't be afraid to interrupt them. Your group will understand why you do it and will appreciate it.

Interview

Is there someone interested that you think you'll group would like to listen to?   Setup a Meetup Event to have members listen and ask questions.

You may want to ask the members in the group for questions before the Meetup Event so you can prepare the interviewer. This will ensure that members in the group get the information they want and the person being interviewed can have well plan out answers that will be beneficial to your group.

Happy Hour/ Social / Meet and Greet

These are events in which you get people out to just socialize and mingle with no topic or structured layout. They may have a start time, but members are able to come and leave as they please.

It is important for most groups to have some social Meetup Event. They are a good way to get members to come out and meet you and everyone else. It helps them become more comfortable attending future events since they know who they can expect to see at the next Meetup Event. Because there is no commitment to stay, you typically will have a higher turnout for this type of Meetup Event.

Here are some tips when you host this type of Meetup Event:
- Feel free to drink, but don't get drunk
- Try not to pick up a girl or a guy (Yes, even if they are really cute)
- Mingle and say "hi" to everyone, don't focus on one person

Choosing the Right Venue to Host your Meetup Event

At this point you should know the topic and the format style for your Meetup Event, the next step is to pick a place to host your event. There are a few items that you will want to keep in mind when choosing a venue. A great Meetup Event idea could turn bad if it is hosted at the wrong place. Make sure to plan ahead so this doesn't happen to you.

Cost: I recommended hosting your Meetup Event at a place that is free or at a very minimum cost. Not charging usually helps get more members to RSVP and attend. If there is a cost and you need to charge members, just include what the charge is for in the Meetup Event description.

Don't be afraid to negotiate for a discount or even for a free space with a venue. You could offer to advertise for them on your sponsor page or schedule several Meetup Events there, in return for a discount. You could also consider offering scheduling the Meetup Event on a less busy night that would be free. The worst that the venue can say is "no," but if they say "yes" you will have a great place to host your Meetup Event.

But only 5 people come out to my event, how can I negotiate? Think about teaming up with another Meetup Group (regardless of the type of Meetup Group) to host an event on the same night at the same place. So, if both groups have 5 people, now you'll have 10 people going. Just choose different corners of the place, to make it easy for each group to hear themselves.

Location: Host your Meetup Event in a place that is centrally located for most members. Make sure that is close to public transportation or parking for those with cars.

Noise: You want to ensure that the place you choose is not to loud. Even if you are hosting a happy hour at a bar, make sure that the volume of the music is low enough so that people do not need to yell or have a hard time hearing others that are a few feet away.

Size: Make sure you choose a place that is appropriate for the number of people you expect to attend. If you are having a social gathering of 20 people, having a venue that is too big will have members too far from each other to interact. On the other side an event with 50 people in a space that only fits 40 people will be an issue was well.

Do they have what you need?: If your Meetup Event requires special equipment such as a chalk board, mirrors, TV screen, or a projector make sure that they have it or can accommodate you if you bring your own.

If you are not familiar with the venue, don't just rely on internet pictures and their website to make your decision. Some venues significantly change depending on the day of the week. Go to the venue to check it out and specifically ask about the day/time you are looking to host your Meetup Event.

Finding the Venue to Host your Meetup Event

Now that you have figured out what you should be looking for in a venue, the next step is to actually find one. Depending on your Meetup Group you may only need one venue that you can use over and over. For some other groups like "Random Events" in which they need to change their venue almost every time, finding different venues is a bit more challenging. Here are several ways that will help you find the best place for your Meetup Event:

Contact the venue before scheduling it! You want to make sure that the venue will be able to accommodate your Meetup Event. It is possible the venue or even a public park may have a special event going on that may interfere with your Meetup Event. It is also recommended to call a week and then a day before to confirm that nothing has changed and they are expecting you.

Meetup Groups: By using the search feature on Meetup.com you can search for other groups that may have done the same or something similar that you want to do. Search their current and past events to get ideas on places that you may be able to host your Meetup Event.

Using "Find a Meetup Group" at the top of any page of Meetup.com you can search for groups and topics. Clicking "Upcoming Meetups" you can quickly sort through all events that pertain to your search word. This makes it easy to browse through them to find one hosting a Meetup Event at a venue you could use.

Figure 2: Show Upcoming Meetup Events for a specific topic or interests

Meetup Events Venues: Using the "Find a Meetup Venue" under the "Where is it?" section when creating a new Meetup Event, you can search thousands of locations by keywords that other Meetup Groups have hosted events at. These venues also have Meetup members review so you can get to know a bit more about the place before contacting them.

When you are creating your Meetup Event and need to "Select a place" after you add a place under the "Find a place" tab, it will turn into a link. Click on that link and check under "Upcoming Meetups" for a list of other Meetup Groups and dates that they'll be there so you don't host your Meetup Event on the same day.

Local papers/magazines: Most cities and towns have a local paper that highlights new businesses. New businesses are usually looking to generate new customers and are willing to work with you to secure a space to host your Meetup Event.

Walk around the town: The option for finding a venue that most people forget about is just walking around your neighborhood. Keep an eye out for places where you could host your Meetup Event. You may find a nice park with benches, a new store, a quiet coffee shop, or some other great spot that you never knew about.

If you are going to be reaching out to several venues, write a simple template to provide to these places. The template should be short and to the point, but include information about what you are looking to do and how the venue will benefit. See the end of this manual under "Resources" for the Random Events email template.

Planning tips before scheduling your Meetup Event

I know you are excited to start scheduling your Meetup Event, but take a breath and relax, let's plan this out together. Your first few Meetup Events could be some of the most important Meetup Events that you will schedule. Two of the most common things members look at before they join a group and attend a Meetup Event are the past events and the number of attendees for that Meetup Event. This is why it is essential to plan out your first few Meetup Events strategically.

Do not be upset if your first few Meetup Events don't have a large turnout, it is normal. **Don't give up!** My first Meetup Event was a yoga event, and with 400 people in the group only 3 people attended.

Consider a few events at the same time: It's not a necessity, but by scheduling two or three events helps show the members in the group what type of Meetup Events they can expect to see in your Group. This also **shows members that you plan on keeping an active Meetup Group** and will have a **higher success rate of attracting new members**.

Think about changing the day of the week or time slightly for each Meetup Event to cater to different work schedules. This gives members options to attend an event that my fit their schedule better. The more people you are able to get out, the more likely you are to have them come out to future events.

Prepare for the event before advertising: Make sure that you have contacted the venue, planned out the details, and wrote up a description before scheduling it. If you change a Meetup Event several times, members may become annoyed and not attend. It also shows members a lack of organization.

Before you schedule the Meetup Event, **have a co-organizer, friend, family member or someone else and the venue to look at it**. Ask them if it is clear to them and ask them to explain to you in their own words what the Meetup Event is about. If they can do that, then you are ready to schedule it. There have been several times, that I have posted events with the wrong date, spelling errors, even the wrong picture of something.

If you are scheduling several of the same events you can use Meetup's "Automatically repeat this Meetup" feature (Figure 3). If it's not a reoccurring event you can open a currently/past event and choose "Copy" (Figure 4). This will make it quicker to schedule a Meetup Event and ensure consistency.

Figure 3: Automatically repeat option when scheduling a new Meetup Event

Figure 4: Use the "Copy" link to reuse your previously created Meetup Event

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Schedule a Meetup Event two weeks out: Scheduling a Meetup Event two weeks from your posting date gives you the chance to get more members to sign up to your Meetup Group and Meetup Event. This is because you have more time for members searching Meetup for Events to find your Meetup Group and current members to send to friends for them to sign up. Scheduling Meetup Events **over three weeks in the future sometimes gets less RSVPs** because it is too far away and people could forget about it.

Under "Email Settings" when creating a Meetup Event, you have the option to "Email members automatic reminders". This will send them a reminder 14 days, 7 days, and 1 day before the Meetup Event.

Figure 5: Email settings

Many members sign up with an extra email account to Meetup because they do get a ton of emails from numerous Meetup Groups. That means members may browse through this email account once a week. Therefore **scheduling a Meetup Event less than one week in advance could be a problem** as some people may not see it.

Advice on charging members for your Meetup Event

Obviously if what you are doing costs money, then you will need to charge the members in the group. Then the question is, do you make it mandatory for them to pay on the site or when they show up? What if what you are doing is free, like a book club or a getting together to trade baseball cards? You still have Meetup fees and the time you put into organizing an event, so should you charge members then? Here are a few things to keep in mind when choosing whether to charge members:

The crowded store syndrome: Have you ever walked past a store and saw a ton of people inside? Don't you go over and see what's going on? Yup, the same thing happens here. Most of the time people don't want to be the first ones to RSVP, but once there have been several people RSVP "Yes", more people will RSVP "Yes" just because others have done it. Keep in mind a "Yes", doesn't always mean they will show up.

Too many people show up: If you have limited spots for your Meetup Event and you don't make charging mandatory then you may end up turning people away. That doesn't make people happy and you never want unhappy members.

PayPal & Amazon fees: Remember you have to pay PayPal fees so you will have to charge a bit more than the actual cost of the event or else you will have to pay the fees out of your pocket.

Just $1: Some Meetup Groups charge members just one dollar to attend. This can be done online or at the Meetup Event. This helps lower the amount of people who RSVP "Yes", but don't show up.

Membership Fees: With so many free Meetup Groups, it's hard to get new members if you charge a membership fee. However, this may work for some groups depending on what you are offering to be a paid member.

Two-tier payment: If they pay online it costs $5, but if they show up without pre-payment it will be $10. This gives people the incentive to sign up early to save money. In smaller groups, this seems to work the best. When you notice that you start filling up your Meetup Events, then making it required before may be the better choice for you.

Pay and get some back: Some organizers charge members $10, but then when they show up to the event get $5 back. Members tend to show up more, since they don't want to lose that $5.

Pay and get all back: If you are using Paypal or Amazon to collect payments, you will be charged a fee per transaction. So if you intend on giving back the full amount, you will have to take into consideration that fee.   You can refund once the event is over, but it is not recommended because it takes a lot more administrative work to keep up.

If you are going to **charge members for a free event, make it clear what members are paying for.** Members are unaware of the Meetup fees, Paypal / Amazon Fees, and all the work that goes into scheduling a Meetup Event.

TWO WEEKS BEFORE – Scheduling your Meetup Event

At this point you have chosen the format, selected the location/venue, contacted the venue and are now ready to schedule it. As discussed earlier, **scheduling a Meetup Event two weeks in advance is recommended**, but not required.

Putting together an easy-to read and good-looking Meetup Event is important. If the description is confusing, it can keep users from signing up. In this section we will provide some insight on making your Meetup Event description attractive for members.

The Top 5 things you need to know, 2 WEEKS BEFORE
1) Create a meaningful and catchy title.
2) Keep the description short and to the point with as much detail as is needed.
3) Consider your payment options.
4) Try to avoid changing details and sending out emails regarding changes.
5) Promote using different methods.

Filling out the options to schedule your Meetup Event

Scheduling a Meetup Event is easy and can be done in a few ways. The easiest way is by clicking "Group Tools" from the main page and selecting "Schedule a Meetup". Below is a list of fields that you will need to complete before you post. Take the following into consideration when filling them out:

Meetup Event Name You have 80 characters to get your point across, so choose wisely. Try not to abbreviate words that are not commonly known. Make it catchy, fun, but still clear about what the event is about.

Use words that members would search for to find the Meetup Event in the title. When non-members search for a Meetup Group or something to do, if they use the same work as you have in your title, then your Meetup Event may appear in their search results.

Your title is the first part of your Meetup Event a member will see, so **make sure it's catchy** and has some information on what they should expect. An example of this is "Hollywood Stunts – Trampoline, Free Fall, and Fight like a Movie Star". By reading this you pretty much know what is going to happen, opposed to "Hollywood Stunts – come out and have fun". For events that are free, I also recommend adding "FREE" in the title. Everyone loves to do stuff for free, so make sure they know it is.

Date Make sure it is the right date! Specifically look at this if you are copying a Meetup Event from an existing one you scheduled. I have overlooked this a few times and had to send out an "oops" email to all my members.

Description This is the most important part of your Meetup Event. **The typical person looks at a webpage for between 7-10 seconds**, so make sure you do the following:

- Start with 1-2 sentences introducing members and the event. You might try to add humor
- Keep the information short, but detailed
- Use bullet points and bold key items that they should know
- Try to keep the same format for each of your Meetup Events
- Add a video if you think it will help explain what the Meetup Event is about

Sometimes people ask questions, so consider adding a "Questions" section at the bottom of the description. Keep this updated as you get questions. This will help reduce the questions you get and help others that may be wondering the same thing.

Below is the format which I have decided to use in the description, but feel free to create your own.

<Intro>
Have you ever wanted to fly like a bird? If so, join us while we soar above the tree tops hang gliding. Yup, that's right hang gliding.

<Brief Description>
John's hang gliding team has given us a crazy discount. Plan for a full day from 8:30am to 1pm. Total flight time will be 20 minutes (depending on the wind it may be more). If you want your video taken while in the air, it will be an extra charge. For more details visit John's hang gliding site here <Link to site>

When: Tue, Jun 20th
Time: 8:30pm – 1pm
Location: 123 Broadway (in front of the big red sign)
Length: 20 minutes
Min/Max People: 6 / 30
Cost: $X / FREE!!!
Skill Level: Beginner to advanced
What to bring: A smile
What to wear: Casual, no open-toed shoes
What is included: Admission
Questions: Are there bathrooms? "YES"
<Video> Link to Youtube or other video site

Don't forget you can embed videos into your description page. I would recommend adding a video if it will help members understand what the Meetup Event is about. An example is embedding the trailer for a movie Meetup Event or Hustle video for a dance Meetup Event. If you **do include a video, then also include the link** to the video as well under it. Most mobile devices can't view the video on your Meetup Event page, but they can click a link to open it up to view it.

Image Always use an image. Search for an image in Google that will express what your Meetup Event is about. A picture also helps get people to read on. Make sure that the image that you are going to use is not a registered trademark or have a copyright.

Automatically Repeat this Meetup Event Once you have a Meetup Group with people coming out all the time, this may be an option you want to choose. This will allow you to setup a Meetup Event over and over again, so you don't have to manually create and post each one.

Where is it? Search for the venue you are going to host your event at. You can select from one you previously used before, find one that others have used or add a new one.

If you plan on going to a park, or some place that does not have an actual address; locate a restaurant, museum or something else with a **physical address** and use that. This will also make it easier for the members in the group to find the location to gather.

Only my members can see where this Meetup Event is happening? Hiding the venue provides two major benefits. The first is that if someone who is not a member wants to attend, they can't just show up. They will need to become a member and RSVP. The second is that for events that have a maximum capacity, you don't have to worry about exceeding this by people just showing up.

How will members find you there? Think about wearing a hat, holding a sign, flag, or something else that people will be able to find you.

Before I made T-shirts, I printed out a huge sign with "RANDOM EVENTS". I wore it around my neck with a piece of string like a necklace. Yes… it was very VERY embarrassing at first, but members loved it and they could always find me.

Charging for this Meetup Event? This is a question that many organizers are faced with. See the "To charge or not to charge" section of the guide for advice on what to do.

RSVP? Depending on your Meetup Event, you may need to limit the amount of people who can attend. Under the RSVP, you can also set when users can RSVP from and until. If you choose to use the "Members can RSVP until" selection, you should make it clear in your description when users can RSVP.

Meetup Events that are free have a lot of "Yes" RSVP's, but many never attend. Don't think it has something to do with you, this is typical. When I started, I used a 70/30 rule, which means that out of 100 people I expect 30 people to show up. As you plan more Meetup Events you will see what your own rule turns out to be.

Email Settings: This is a great way to remind the members in the group of an event. When you select this, the following emails are sent:

14 days before: The Meetup Event is announced to group members who haven't RSVPed.

7 days before: People who have RSVPed get a reminder that they said they'd be there.

1 day before: Everyone gets a last-minute reminder.

Members get a lot of emails from many different groups. **Limit the number of emails you send** to them. If an event is full, I recommend un-checking the automatic reminder, so a member does not get emailed for an event they can't sign up to anyway.

Ask questions when members RSVP: If you need to know something from the members in the group for the Meetup Event, you can have them answer a question. You can't make this field mandatory, so a member can leave this blank.

If you are asking members a question, give them options to choose from. A common example is trying to arrange carpooling. An example of questions for the event would be: "Do you have a car, if yes how many people can you drive"

Getting Members to sign up for your Meetup Event.

"the crowded store syndrome" mentioned earlier, which is when members sign up because they see others members signed up, is one of the most effective ways to get more members. So how do you get people to sign up? Here are a few things that you can do:

Friends, family, co-Workers: When you setup your Meetup Event, do your best to get people to sign up. Ask friends, family, and co-workers. Even if they are not going to actually show up, it will make it seem like a lot of people are interested so other members will join.

Email directly: Reach out to members that are in your group by sending them a personal message (not the group email). You also have the ability to contact up to 15 Meetup members that are not in your group. You can find them by browsing other Meetup Groups.

Reaching out to similar Meetup Groups: Contact other organizers like yourself to set up a joint Meetup Event. This will help them and you get more members.

Honestly, **as an organizer this is the hardest part!** Getting members to sign up is really out of your control. You can do a few things to try to help, but it's just a waiting game. Don't get upset, don't email the members in the group "why aren't you signing up?" and most importantly don't give up. Ask your friends, family and people that you trust to take a look at your site and ask them for suggestions. You should also look into seeing if your city has an organizer's Meetup Groups like the one in New York City (http://www.meetup.com/organize). This is a good way to network with your fellow organizer and get some helpful ideas.

Promoting your Meetup Event

So you have scheduled your Meetup Event, now how are non-members going to find out about it? There are several internet sites that you should consider using to help get the word about your Meetup Group and the Meetup Event that you scheduled.

I recommend purchasing a URL via a domain site like godaddy.com, by using this LINK you'll receive **URL's for only $7.49 a year**. So, why not? A website address is easy to tell someone, which will make it easier for them to join you. It's super easy to do!

Meetup.com: Leverage other Meetup Groups to promote your Meetup Event. Reach out to other organizers to see if they will re-post your Meetup Event on their page or email their members promoting for you. In return you can offer to add a link to their Meetup Group and/or repost some of their Meetup Events in the future.

Facebook.com and other Social Networking sites: More and more people are using social networking sites to communicate and share information. These sites can be used in several different ways to help promote your Meetup Group and individual Meetup Events you host.

- **Post to Facebook:** You have the option to link your Meetup profile to Facebook. Every time you schedule or change a Meetup Event you have the ability via a Meetup Popup screen to post to your Facebook page.
- **Join Facebook groups:** Search for a group that may have members that you would want to attract. Remember that many groups are not specific to your town, but do your best to find ones that are. After joining, post comments on the wall about your Meetup Group and upcoming Meetup Events.
- **Create a Facebook group:** Creating a Facebook group is easy and you can find how to create one at Facebook.com. Having a Facebook group allows people to "like" the group which then shows up in their profiles for others to see. You can also post up your upcoming Meetup Events here for people to see who may not be members of your Meetup Group.

Twitter.com: If you plan on constantly communicating to your Meetup Group conceder creating a Twitter account. With Twitter you can post up brief updates that members can subscribe to. Just as other social networking sites you can attract more members and keep existing ones informed.

Having Social Networking sites/group is **double work!** You will need to keep both your Meetup Group and Facebook Group/Twitter account updated. Before you create one of these, evaluate how big your town is and if creating a group is the best for you. Simply posting your Meetup Events to your personal site may be enough.

Craigslist.com: Craigslist.com is a free classified ads site. It is a powerful advertising tool that you can use to post up ads promoting your Meetup Group and Meetup Event. Since craigslist is specific to a city and sometimes even towns, it helps directly target people that may be interested in joining your Meetup Event.   Some companies and schools provide their own classified site that you can utilize as well.

YouTube.com: If a picture is worth 1,000 words, then a video is worth 1 billion! Continue to take pictures, but consider take video as well. Video allows members that did not attend a better feeling for what they missed out on. When posting similar Meetup Events, you can reference this video so members know what they can expect. Members that attended and you took video of also enjoy watching the videos. Some members post these videos to their social networking site, which again helps promote your Meetup Group.

Regardless if it's a Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or some other site, keeping the look of your page consistent with your Meetup Group Theme is important. Having the same logos, fonts, colors make your Group look more professional which in turn will help attract new members. PuppetDesignNY.com can provide assistance in doing this if you need the help.

Printed Material: Think about promoting outside of the internet. Print up signs, banners and flyers that you can hang up in local restaurants and stores, specifically in places that relate directly to your Meetup Group. Carry business cards around with you, so if you meet someone they won't have to remember your Group name, they can just look at the card.

Meetup.com makes it easy for you to print out some pre-created items for your Meetup Group. From your Meetup Group's main page, click "More" and choose "Promote".   From here you can print out: Name Tags, Flyers with tear offs, business cards, post cards, table signs and Meetup Logos .

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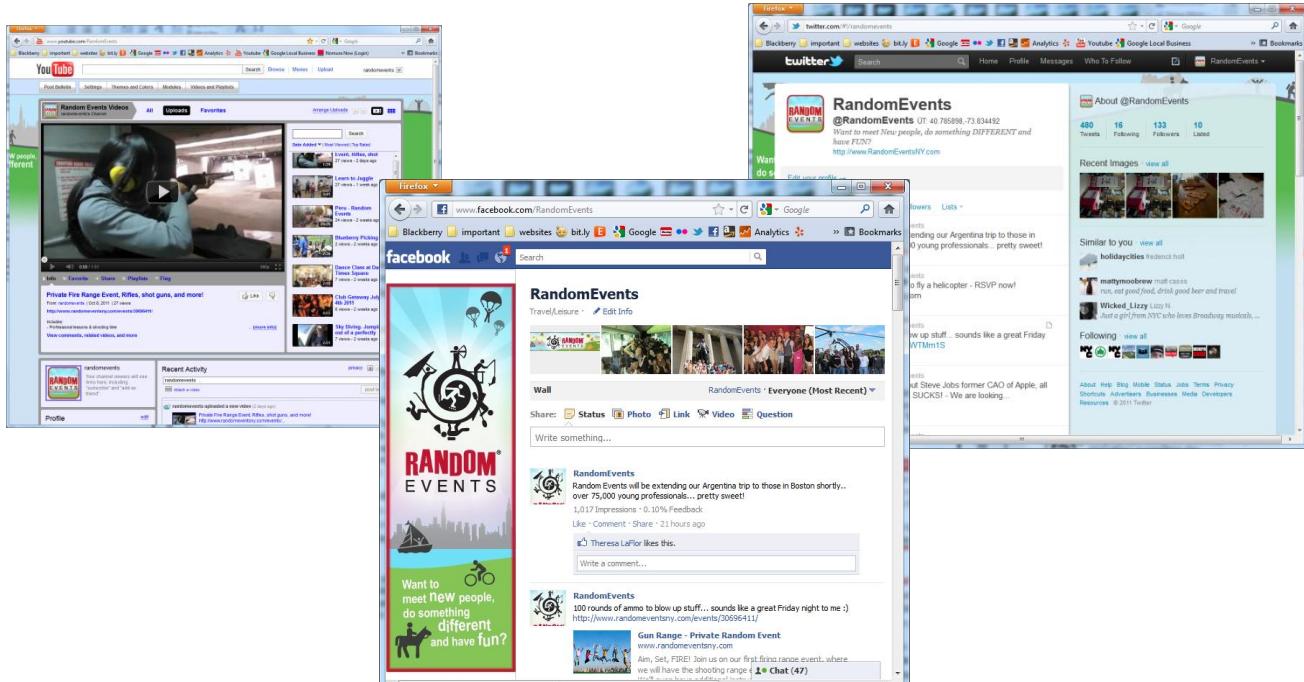
ONE DAY BEFORE – Preparing for your Meetup Event

All your planning, scheduling, and prep work is about to pay off. There are just a few things that you should do **the day before** your Meetup Event. These items will really help make sure that your Meetup Event will run smoothly:

You may even want to **add a calendar reminder in your BlackBerry Smartphone or iPhone** so you remember to do it. Put all these items next to the door or in your car, so you don't forget to take them when you leave.

You can get automatic SMS/Mobile reminders sent to your phone. To set this up:
1) Go to "Account" on the upper right
2) Choose "Membership & Communication" on the left
3) Scroll down to "SMS/Mobile reminders"

The Top 5 things you need to know, 1 DAY BEFORE.
1) Confirm with the venue they are ready for you to show up.
2) Review the answers to questions, comments and emails you may have received .
3) Email the members in the group and co-organizers with last minute details and a way to find you.
4) Have ice breaks ready to engage members on both a 1 on 1 biases and group scenario
5) Pack everything you need together by the door so you are ready to go.

Steps to take before your Meetup Event

These are items that most of you will find yourself doing before every event. Following these items will not only make your Meetup Event run smoothly, but you'll be able to sleep at night knowing that you are ready for your big day tomorrow.

Confirm your venue: If you are hosting your Meetup Event at a store, restaurant, bar, or renting out space give them **a call and ensure they know you are coming and** how many people you are expecting so they can make any last arrangements.

DO NOT SKIP THIS! There is nothing worst then showing up with the members in the group and having the venue say, "sorry, we don't have room, don't see the reservation," or something else.

Email the "Yes" and "Maybe" members: Write a personal reminder to the members in the group about your Meetup Event tomorrow. Keep the email very short. Just put all the important information such as: time, how to find you, anything they should remember to bring, and **a way to contact you** if they are running late, can't find you or have questions.

Some organizers do not like to give their personal mobile numbers out. Take a look at http://voice.google.com, for free you can get a new number that will forward to your personal mobile number. This service allows you to block numbers, in the event a member abuses it.

Print out attendee summary: Have the list of people ready for tomorrow. Check people as they come in. **This is very important to do if you had people pre-pay**. This also shows the members in the group that you are organized and will appreciate it.

Check question responses: If you had the members in the group fill out questions about the Meetup Event, you will want to look at it again. Members may have changed it or asked for something, so you should be prepared for it.

Look at the members in the group' profiles: This is going above and beyond as an organizer, but will mean so much to the members in the group. Browse through the profiles of the members that are attending. Check out their pictures and responses to any questions they filled out. When you meet them, say something "I saw you went skydiving, how was it?" or "I noticed you are part of a trapeze Meetup Event, how long have you been flying in the air?"

Be prepared for anything: You are the organizer; you should be prepared for anything and everything. Bring along a bag that has these items: Camera, pens, paper, tape, first aid kit, name tags, Meetup Event table toppers, Meetup Event signs, and something with your Meetup Group's web address so you can hand out to people passing by asking what the group is about. It also can't hurt to bring along some gum, mints, mouth wash, deodorant and perfume/cologne.

Assistant Organizers: If you have assistant organizers, it's best to give them a call to remind them of the Meetup Event tomorrow. Also, make sure your assistant organizers know what they are responsible for.

Ice breaker techniques: If people are meeting for the first time, it's hard to get people talking and socializing. Search Google for "ice breaker games" and you will get tons of them.

At every event no matter how many people, 3 to 400+, I make sure **everyone gets a name tag**. Yea, it is a bit "dorky", but honestly it's fun and members do love it. It's a bit uncomfortable not remembering someone's name, so this stops that feeling. As an organizer, you are going to meet tons of people and being able to call someone by their first name helps show the members in the group you care.

Meetup.com allows you to print out your own name tags. On the Meetup Event, under "Who is coming?" there is a link to "Print name tags."

Last minute email check: Checking your email prior to the event periodically is important. No matter how many emails you send out or clear you write your description, there are always a few people to ask questions or cancel a few hours before. On the positive side, you may also get those members that want to sign up too and they will email you.

I highly recommend organizers to **invest in getting a BlackBerry Smartphone, iPhone,** or some other device that you can receive emails on. It will make it much easier to keep organized.

You can go to m.meetup.com for Meetup.com's mobile website. Meetup also has **an iPhone & Android application** that will allow you to see your upcoming events, check in, see who coming, comments, and take pictures and upload them.

DAY OF THE MEETUP EVENT – Hosting your Meetup Event

Are you excited? Do you have that butterfly feeling in your tummy? Don't worry, that's normal. If you have taken our advice, no need to worry. The venue is set up, the members in the group are informed, and you are packed and now it's time for the Meetup Event. Running the Meetup Event is **by far the most critical part** of everything that you have had to do. If everything is perfect, but members show up and they don't have a good time, all your prep work and planning was wasted. So keep these things in mind:

The Top 5 things you need to know, DURING the Meetup Event

1) Take everything you need: name tags, ice breaker questions, attendee list, pens, camera, etc.
2) Plan to get there at least 30 min early
3) Say "Hello" and "Good bye" to everyone
4) Engage less social people and introduce them to others
5) Take pictures and videos

A few hours before the Meetup Event

Did you print out the list of attendees, check your email for any last member questions, and have everything ready for your Meetup Event? Of course you did! Here are some things to remember to do right before your Meetup Event:

Leave early: Don't be on time, be early! Try to get to the place you are going to meet about **30 minutes before** everyone else. Take this time to say "hi" to the person in charge where you are hosting the event. Get your signs, name tags and other items you will need for your Meetup Event ready so people can find you and start meeting others.

Being early has saved many of my Meetup Events. Once I was hosting a Latin dance class, and when I arrived, the room that we were supposed to use had a leak in it. Because I arrived early, I had enough time to find a new room, set up the equipment, put up signs directing people to the new location, and start on time.

Stand out: If you are in a public place, it may be hard to find your Meetup Event. Even though you have pictures online, it may even be hard to find you. So wear or hold something so people can easily spot you.

Name tags: It's not required, but **highly recommended** that you have everyone wear a name tag. Have them write it themselves so it make it a bit more personable or use Meetup's name tag printing option so it's all setup for when the members in the group arrive.

 I can't stress enough how helpful name tags are. I purchased a set of 10 different markers and allow people to choose the color and write their names. They have fun putting smile faces, flowers, and nick names on them. It really does help members remember others names.

Start on time: Depending on what you are hosting, you want to be considerate to those that are late, but also to those that are there. If there are enough people, **don't wait too long to start** an event.

At the Meetup Event

Get ready, because from now until the end of the Meetup Event you are going to be busy! You are the organizer, everyone is going to expect you know everything… I mean everything. Where are the bathrooms, how long will this take, how much is this, and a ton of other stuff you may not know. Do your best to smile and assist them best you can. Here are some things to make it a bit easier for you:

Greetings: Do your best to say "hello" to every member who attends. Shake their hand, if you remember them say "thanks for coming back," or if it's their first time say "welcome to the group." Just do your best to make them feel welcomed.

 Being social is not easy, especially when you don't know anyone. If they are at your Meetup Event, obviously they want to meet people. Do your best to spot members that are less social and give them attention. Ask them questions to get them talking, then introduce them to others.

Take attendance: As new people arrive, check them off your list of attendees. Keep this list as you will need it when the Meetup Event is over.

Ice breakers: As discussed earlier in this guide have some ice breaker questions and games to get people talking and interacting.

Ask questions and get feedback: It is okay to ask your group their opinion on items. Ask them how they like the way the group is being managed, about the communications you send out, about the co-organizers, events they want to see and then specifically about the Meetup Event they are at.

 As an organizer you may not see everything or have the same impression as the members in the group. In a presentation meeting that I hosted, during the first 15 minute break I asked members "what do you think so far". Some of the feedback was "Could he talk louder", "Can he provide more examples", and other suggestions like that. Providing that feedback to the presenter during the Meetup Event changed the rest of the presentation and in return the members had a much more enjoyable time.

Take pictures/video: Take pictures of everyone having fun. Posting the pictures up after the Meetup Event will bring people back to your site to check them out. It also shows other members the number of people that came out. If you are doing something like white water rafting, hang gliding, or playing freebee you may want to create a video and post it up to Youtube.

 I recommend taking a group picture at every event. Make this your photo album cover for that Meetup Event. This will show other members how many people really were there.

Ask for help with the next Meetup Event: Being an organizer is not easy. Sometimes you may need help. Ask the members in the group who would like to assist in organizing the next one. Members that come out to your event are more and likely the ones that are going to be willing to help you with your future Meetup Events.

Say goodbye: All good things must come to an end, and when they do, say goodbye. Goodbyes are just as important as saying "hello." People remember the last thing that happens to them the most clearly. By saying "bye, thanks for coming out", they will walk away saying to themselves "wow, the organizer really appreciated me coming."

AFTER THE MEETUP EVENT

I bet you thought you were done. Well….almost. This is the part that most people forget to do, or wait too long to do it. It's best to do this the day after. It's what I would call the administration part of being an organizer. Following these items will help you learn more about your group and get more members to join.

The Top 5 things you need to know, AFTER the Meetup Event

1) Edit RSVP's for those that did not attend
2) Post pictures and videos
3) Send a follow up email to the members who attended
4) Read comments that members posted
5) Update money module

Edit RSVPs: Take your attendee list that you used to check everyone in and mark people who did not attend "absent". Marking members as "absent" will remove them from the list of people attended and block them from writing comments and rating the Meetup Event. This will also help you keep track of which Meetup Event had more members, so you could throw this Meetup Event again.

Once a Meetup Event is over, go to that specific Meetup Event page. On the right side under "Who attended" you can select "edit attendance."

Post pictures and upload videos: Uploading pictures as soon as you can is important. People will go back to the page to check for the pictures and rate the group. If the picture is there when they are rating they may share the picture with a social networking site and that may bring more people to your Meetup Group.

If you plan on taking many videos, I would recommend creating a YouTube site that has the same group name. This will make it easy for people to find it. For example my Meetup Group is www.RandomEventNY.com and my YouTube site is www.YouTube.com/RandomEvents

Consider branding your pictures by adding your Meetup Event URL and or logo on the bottom of them. When members repost them on their social networking it is like free advertising of your Meetup Group to their friends. Figure 6 shows what the Random Events branding looks like.

Figure 6 – Branding photos with a URL

Send a follow up email: After you have posted your pictures and uploaded your videos. It's time to send out an email to everyone who attended. The email should be brief and include: a thank you, kudos to anyone that helped out, asking members to fill out survey, links to the pictures and videos.

Read comments and check ratings: Some Members that rate the Meetup Event may add comments. Read them, sometimes they provide some items you may want to address for your next Meetup Event.

 Most members will not rate the Meetup Event. That does NOT mean they didn't like it or didn't have fun. It just means they are really busy and didn't get a chance to rate it. Do not take it personally.

Update money: If you use the money application within Meetup Event, take this opportunity to make sure everything is updated. You may have received cash at the Meetup Event or incurred some expenses that you will need to record.

 The money module can be located under "Group Tools," then "Money"

CONGRATULATIONS!!!!
You have done everything you could to make a successful Meetup Event. Pat yourself on your back, you did a great job. Now it's time to start planning your next one. Good luck!

RESOURCES

Designers – Meetup Pages & Themes, Logos, Business Cards, Websites etc…
   PuppetDesignNY.com – Mention "Random Events" for 15% off

Getting a domain/URL name
   GoDaddy.com – Click the link and get domains for $7.49!!!

Sites to Promote:
   Facebook
   Craigslist
   Twitter
   Yelp
   Pixelpipe.com – Post to multiple sites at once

Ice Breakers Links
   http://www.residentassistant.com/games/

Popular Boot Camps
   http://www.meetup.com/organize/

Sharing Files (FREE)
   Drop box – Great for backing up important docs and sharing files!

Picture Editors
   Faststone

Have Your Own Mobile App
   EpicAppSolutions – Mention "Random Events" builds custom mobile applications (They have an easy way to mobilize your Meetup Page. Check out Random Events DEMO)

DONATIONS

I really hope that you were able to take away a few things away. I plan on creating more guides around more specific items like monetizing, getting more members, getting sponsors, and more… **Feel free to help out by even donating a $1**. Thanks and good luck!

Random Events Venue Request Template

<Enter contact name or "To whom it may concern">

My name is Will and I am the organizer of Random Events. We have XXX+ members and growing daily. I am interested in hosting an event with you.

Feel free to take a look at our promotional video to learn more about us: http://youtube.com/randomevents or visit our site to see our past and upcoming events http://www.randomeventsny.com

Would you be able to provide any special group discounts if I host the event for X amount of people? I am open to different options regarding time/date/length of the event that would be favorable for both of us to get a reduce price.

If the cost is attractive and we proceed, posting on our site will offer you the following benefits:

1) Exposure to thousands of people though meetup.com & thousands of members in my group

2) Due to our site traffic, items that we post also rank high in Google's search, so people looking for a similar event will find our site and then find your venue even if the event has past.

3) Venues that I have organized with have been very successful as they have had numerous new people sign up outside of the group.

4) Other companies & groups watch my success and will usually call venues shortly after to host an event, providing even more business to you. (We never discuss prices)If this is successful I would like to build a partnership with you for future events.

Free to give me a call to discuss further: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Thank you,

Will