



— THE HAPPY —
EVENT PLANNER

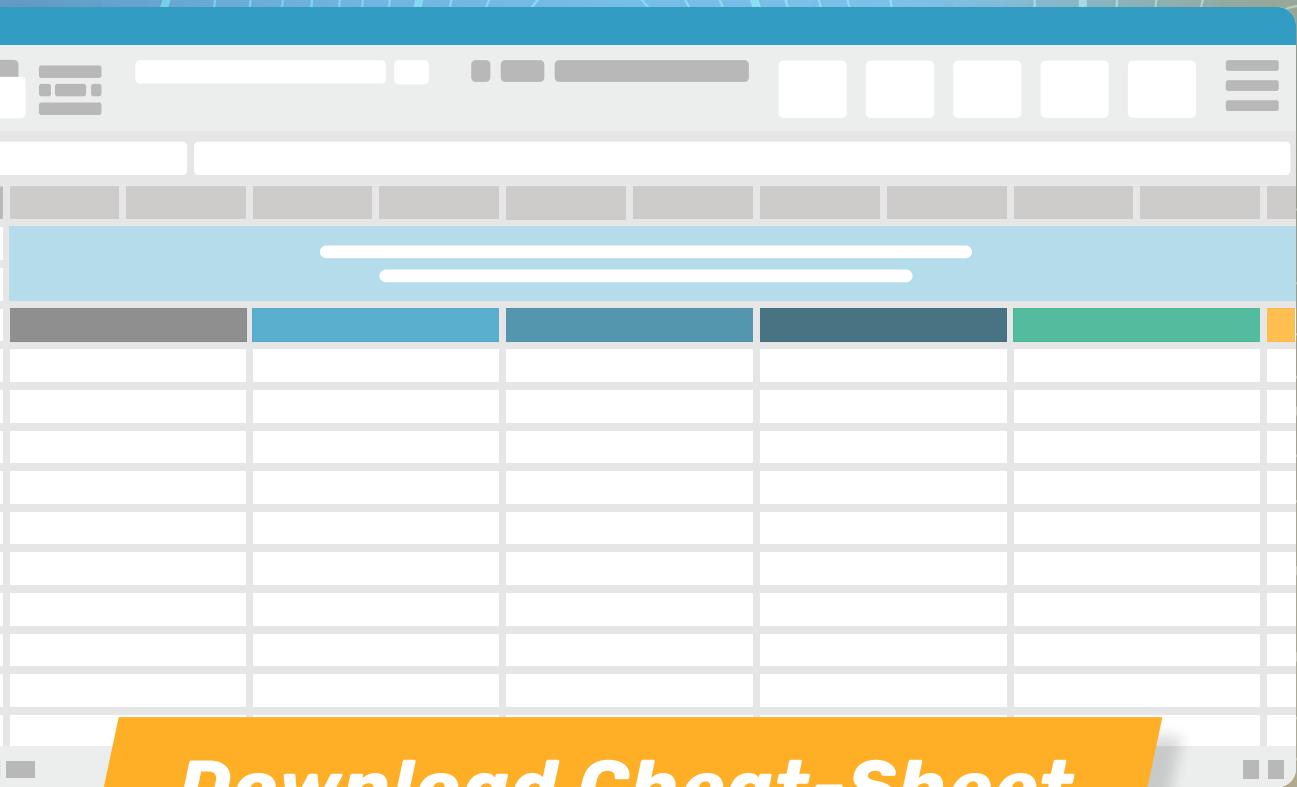
The Event

Attendee Journey

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Like the stoics of old, planning for the worst enables us to foresee weakness, then adapt to perform at our best. This is the core purpose of the event attendee journey map. In this resource, we'll explain the uses and benefits of event attendee journey mapping, plot out the opportunities and challenges of the key touchpoints, and provide useful tips on customer segmentation. Plus, we've included a link to a freely downloadable event attendee journey cheat-sheet.



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What is an Event

Attendee Journey?

The experiences of attendees before, during, and after an event is known as the event attendee journey. Mapping out the event attendee journey in detail is a vital step towards improving the experiences of event guests and the success of events.

Studying and mapping out each phase of the event attendee journey allows event organisers, managers, and marketers to maximise the performance, efficiency, and effectiveness of their events. If this is your first time mapping an event attendee journey, consider the useful metaphor of a B2C retail website's customer journey. Each step, from first view to final sale, is designed to take customers click-by-click down the funnel towards the checkout.

This step-by-step approach is vital for effectively mapping event attendee journeys too. They should begin with your brand's very first interaction with a potential attendee all the way through to your very last.

Putting together a plan this detailed might seem like extra work, but the insights gathered are undoubtedly worth the effort.



Why is it Important to Understand an Event Attendee Journey?

The advantages of having a firm grasp on the event attendee journey are myriad:



1. Foreseeing Weaknesses

Event attendee journey maps can be used as a point-by-point tool for envisaging the attendee perspective before the event has even been publicly announced. By working through each touchpoint chronologically, event organisers can pinpoint areas of weakness and potential obstacles wherein the attendee experience suffers. Then, they can amend them before they ever become an issue.

Before the event, this could include moments when guests might be confused or neglected through a lack of information or, conversely, when they might feel frustrated and overwhelmed by a deluge of emails.





2. Adding Sparkle

The value of a comprehensive event journey map not only comes in uncovering areas of weakness, but also areas of mediocrity.

Even the most educational of events needs some element of the fun factor to keep guests engaged. You may well discover that your spread of entertainment is imbalanced, and that one afternoon of your three-day event a bit too dull.

A comprehensive plan allows you to sprinkle a little excitement over every part of your event. Pinpoint the areas of “meh” and add some fun. Or pinpoint areas where there is “too much fun” and switch it out for a value-adding seminar.

A masterfully put together event journey can go a long way to creating an event that is not just “good” but unforgettable.

3. The Empathetic Approach

Understanding the event attendee journey provides insights into the event attendee perspective. Recently, we published a detailed report based on our survey of over 500 event professionals. One of the report's key insights into the events community was the need for more empathetic outreach to attendees.

As event specialists, it's vital to continually put ourselves in the shoes of would-be attendees. When you last went to an event, how did you feel? What could have been improved? What gave you the most value? What made you engage? Did your more outgoing or shy colleagues feel differently? What would have helped them?

Plotting the event attendee journey acts as a valuable empathy-building exercise. It helps to understand attendee motivations, objectives, cares, doubts, fears, and attention spans. This comes as part of a larger (long over-due) events trend that emphasizes the importance of treating attendees as valued individuals, not statistics.



4. The Long Game



While significant for understanding the emotions of attendees, mapping event attendee journeys is, at its core, a process of data gathering, analysis, and evaluation. While the data can be used to predict problems in advance, Minority Report style, it can be highly valuable for future events too.

Fresh off any event, the event team should be meeting to discuss what went wrong, what went well, and how to improve things for next time. Often, the problem with those kinds of meetings is that they lack specificity; statements like “We didn’t have enough registrations” or “Event attendees seem underwhelmed with Day 2” are insufficient. The event attendee journey map should be made the central tool for this evaluation. It will allow you to target the individual touchpoints that need optimising next time around.

The Crucial Stages and Touchpoints of an Event

Attendee Journey?

Events vary significantly, though they do tend to follow a similar structure. Here are the key phases for an event coupled with the questions you should be asking yourself as you plan each one out:



1. Pre-Contact Research

- Have you analysed similar events that performed well or performed poorly?
- Have you conducted segmented target group research?
- Do you know what your attendees are really looking for?

1.1 Pre-Registration Contact: Invitations and Organic Signups

- How are people finding out about your event?
- Are your communications SEO optimised?
- Are you effectively contacting would-be attendees from your mailing lists and user databases?
- Are your invitations visually appealing, precise, and accurate?
- Will your invitations look sleek on mobile as well as PC?
- Are your invitations compliant with all email systems and will they be sent to junk folders?
- Do your invites align with your attendees' values and objectives?

2. Pre-Registration Contact: Reminders

- Are your reminders well-timed?
- Do your reminders provide all the necessary information?
- Are your reminders too pushy or too meek?
- Are your reminders tailored to your target group segmentation?
- Are you sending too few or too many reminders?
- Have you adjusted the tone of your reminders for last-minute registrations?
- If you have an event app, do you send reminders via that too?

3.1 Registration: Registration Page

- Is your registration page streamlined and appealing?
- Do prospective attendees have to fill out too much information?
- Is the registration page compatible with all browsers and platforms?
- Have you defined your time zones?
- Does the registration page contribute to the event's appeal with images, agendas, sponsors, and other info?

3.2 Registration: Confirmation Email

- Is the confirmation email sent immediately after registration?
- Does it contain a useful summary of key information?
- Is there an add-to-calendar link?
- Will the title of the email make it easily findable later?
- Have you considered rewarding registered attendees with surprise content?

3.2 Registration: Pre-Event Communication

- How easy is it to locate and download the agenda and/or event app?
- Is your pre-event communication personalised?
- Have you given attendees the opportunity to decide their own communication preferences?
- Are you unnecessarily repeating information?
- Are you successfully building excitement for the event?
- Are your communications making attendees feel valued?
- Are you sending out valuable content?

4.1 Event Attendance: Joining the Event

- Will onsite registration be streamlined or staggered to avoid queues?
- Will there be entertainment organised for waiting guests?
- Will Wi-Fi be easily accessible and functioning?
- Will there be charging stations?
- Will staff be easily identifiable and spread effectively?

4.2 Event Attendance: Virtual Venues

- Is the login process simple?
- Is the software optimised for all platforms and operating systems?
- What technical issues might crop up on your side and/or on the attendees' side?
- Is there engaging or entertaining content for loading times and downtimes?
- Is there effective tech support on hand?

4.3 Event Attendance: Sessions and Content

- How will you notify attendees of changes to the schedule?
- Is it simple enough to get from one session to another?
- Do attendees have enough time to eat?
- Is there enough seating?

4.4 Event Attendance: Engagement

- Will attendees feel rushed, bored or tired at any point?
- Will interactive non-passive content be well-spread throughout the event?
- Will attendees have the tools they need to engage?
- Is your planned content relevant and value-adding?

4.5 Event Attendance: Networking

- Will event attendees attend both larger sessions and smaller, more social sessions?
- Will you allocate seating to maximise relevant networking?
- How have you facilitated networking for shyer attendees?
- Will there be sufficient downtime?

4.6 Event Attendance: Closing

- Will the final speeches be of the highest quality?
- How will you inform attendees of the next steps, downloadable content, future events, and ways to participate in the community?

5.1 Post-Event: Thank-You Email

- Do you have a thank-you email prepared and ready to send out within 24 hours?
- How much follow-up content will you deploy?
- How personalised will you make your thank-you emails?

5.2 Post-Event: Survey

- How extensive will the attendee feedback you're collecting be?
- Are all your questions relevant?
- How soon after the event will you send it?
- Will you incentivise survey completion with competitions, giveaways, or exclusives?

5.3 Post-Event: On-Demand Content

- Are your materials high-quality?
- How will you notify attendees that the presentations and other content are uploaded and available?
- Will you run post-event competitions and keep the buzz going?
- Will you share pictures and videos of the event with attendees? Have you asked for their permission to do so?

5.4 Post-Event: Community Invitation

- Do attendees understand the benefits of joining your community?
- Have you made it easy enough for them to join?

Touchpoints: Challenges, Opportunities, and Expectations

Each of these touchpoints can result in disaster and event failure if mismanaged or resounding success if managed well. Avoiding common pitfalls, overcoming hurdles, and capitalising on opportunities requires foresight and creativity. Event organisers should seek not only to understand and meet potential attendees' expectations but surpass them.

Let's take a close look at those key touchpoints:



1. Pre-Contact:

Research

Attendee Expectations:

At this stage, would-be attendees or their employers will be in browse-mode, searching for industry-related events that could improve their expertise through insightful content and networking opportunities. They will be hoping to find events that are original, exciting, reputable and value-adding.

Challenges:

As we confirmed in our State of Events Management Report 2022, there are going to be many, many more events in the next couple of years as event specialists make up for lost time. The challenge for organisers, therefore, is distinguishing their events from others. That not only entails getting your event higher up search results through advanced SEO, but also having strong enough copy and offerings that your event appeals to those who do not know exactly what they are looking for.

Opportunities:

Deploying lead magnets at this stage can be a great way to keep your event at the forefront of attendees' minds and begin the process of moving them down the funnel. Give them something of value, such as exclusive content, instead of "selling" your event at stage one. Set the precedent of leading with value to build trust with your audience.

1.1 Pre-Registration Contact:

Invitations and Organic Signups

Attendee Expectations:

Attendees expect a concise email invitation containing all of the key event details and links to further information, as well as a streamlined booking system.

Challenges:

Invitation pitfalls tend to come in two forms. Firstly, the content of the email. Even in today's age of premade attractive templates, all too many event invites are visually unappealing, and the crucial event information is unclear. Secondly, tech problems can majorly hamper your invite efforts. Ensure that your emails are compliant with all email systems, format well on mobile and desktop, and won't go straight to spam. For both types of pitfall, the solution is simple – test them out first.

Opportunities:

Ensure your attendees are being communicated to according to their preferences by using segmented lists (more on this later) and sending personalised invitations which focus on the content you know those invitees are interested in. Be sure to communicate differently with different segments – one of the most important distinctions being guests who have attended before vs those who haven't.

2. Pre-Registration Contact:

Reminder

Attendee Expectations:

Most invitees would expect at least one email reminder before an event has sold out. They do not expect to receive the same content twice, instead they would anticipate further value propositions.

Challenges:

Especially when registration draws near, the temptation is to go hard on the FOMO factor. We've all seen the "Just 10 tickets left" emails, which come across as pushy and stressful to the recipient. While they can be effective, if you push too hard your contacts will unsubscribe from all further communication. Event organisers run the same risks by bombarding invitees with a conveyor belt of reminders.

Opportunities:

Keep personalising the customer journey here. Use data profiles as well as user-submitted preferences to get a good idea of invitee interest levels as opposed to just spamming them, pressuring them, and hoping for the best. Create different reminders for different levels of interest. Focus on those invitees who you can see have opened your emails but haven't yet registered – those are the people your reminders will be most effective for.



3.1 Registration:

Registration Page

Attendee Expectations:

Attendees in this day and age expect simple registration, completable within a couple of minutes. They expect key information but not in excess.

Challenges:

Having a registration form that is too long or too complicated is a guaranteed way to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. For that matter, having a frustrating registration page that doesn't work properly on all browsers or is overloaded with content will have the same effect. Be sure not to overlook basics like defining time-zones for virtual events.

Opportunities:

Make sure your registration finish line is as appealing as your start point. Use the best images of your speakers with well-written proofread bios; make the agenda sound unmissable by using benefit-espousing copy; and have a visually appealing registration form. Moreover, only ask for the barebones attendee details for the registration form – you will have plenty of opportunity for further data-collection later. Right now, the priority is registration.



3.2 Registration:

Confirmation Email

Attendee Expectations:

As a minimum, attendees expect an immediate confirmation email complete with further details on the event and venue.

Challenges:

Confirmation emails have a habit of ending up in spam folders. Add a warning to the registration page advising attendees to check their junk folder. Other common pitfalls at this stage include failing to define time zones, forgetting to include an “add to calendar” link, and giving the email a poorly thought-through subject line that will be difficult for attendees to search for later.

Opportunities:

Use the opportunity of the confirmation email to get attendees to whitelist your event email address so no further correspondence is sent to the spam folder. Give attendees confidence that they have made the right decision by providing them with free gifts or bonuses upon registration completion.

3.3 Registration:

Pre-Event Communication

Attendee Expectations:

Now accustomed to raised standards, attendees have high expectations for pre-event communication. Those include engaging relevant content, options for sending questions to speakers, and exciting updates about the event.

Challenges:

Challenges can come from all directions here, one attendee's "too much communication and too many touchpoints" is another attendee's "not enough". Furthermore, if communication and content is unengaging, invitees may begin to lose their motivation. As well as potential refund requests, you may lose further registrations that come from word-of-mouth recommendations.

Opportunities:

The trick here, as we'll explain later, is effective segmentation and the ability to have users shape their own customer journeys. Be sure to include engagement options that make attendees feel valued, such as Q&As, the provision of email addresses for "event team contacts", and control over their own comms frequency and medium.

4.1 Event Attendance:

Joining the Event

Attendee Expectations:

Attendees expect to be able to join virtual events with just a click. As for live events, they expect them to be streamlined and queue free.

Challenges:

Virtual events all too often have no countdown or host resulting in attendees not even being certain if the event has started. Livestreaming regularly has working visuals but no working audio or vice versa. Joining in-person events can be just as stressful with long wait times, lanyard printing, and no entertainment in the queues.

Opportunities:

Dress rehearsals are the solution here. Test everything then test again. Be sure to have an in-house tech support team available throughout the event, and ensure they are familiar with the platforms you're using. Staggered entry times, digital tickets, and lobby entertainment can streamline the in-person equivalent. First impressions are important, make yours count.

4.2 Event Attendance:

Virtual Venues

Attendee Expectations:

In 2022, attendees expect to be able to navigate their virtual venue without friction or complication.

Challenges:

The most frequent challenges result from unclear instructions and tools. It's safe to assume that it will be many attendees' first time using your platform of choice. Navigating the options can be overwhelming and confusing. Remember that not all of your attendees will be tech savvy.

Opportunities:

Show your attendees that you are prepared through the provision of a resource covering common technical FAQs such as audio and connections issues. Providing these in advance can help to counter any pre-event anxieties. Offer guided onboarding for those still feeling unsure about the tech.



4.3 Event Attendance:

Sessions and Content

Attendee Expectations:

Every attendee expects value-adding talks that are both enjoyable and relevant. They expect the talks to be engaging and professionally delivered.

Challenges:

Lack of variety, lack of engagement, or lack of relevance can each kill the atmosphere of an event. When a talk is falling flat, you can feel the crowd picking up on it. All of these challenges are exacerbated by longer events wherein it's more important than ever to have a diverse range of content and formats that prevent events from growing stale.

Opportunities:

Ensure that your activities and content are relevant and exciting for your target audience. The next challenge is making sure your content is delivered without a hitch. That means sticking to timings, having Plan-B content in reserve in case of unforeseen issues, and having your key speakers do dry runs beforehand so you can offer pre-event feedback.

4.4 Event Attendance:

Engagement

Attendee Expectations:

Event attendees expect not only to listen to experts but to have their own voices listened to. Q&As are the bare minimum.

Challenges:

Event attendees want to feel like they are a part of the event; events that are too top-down and filled with one-way communication are the antithesis of this. There are a great many “danger points” wherein guests could feel unengaged, these begin at hour-one, continue all through the talks, and don’t end until the final hour when everyone is growing tired. Your challenge is to ensure attendees are engaged throughout.

Opportunities:

Whether it’s a workshop or a panel discussion, engagement should be the dish of the day in all of your content offerings. For shy attendees, it’s often just a matter of getting their first few interactions out of the way, before they can get stuck in. Gamification is a low-pressure method of curated engagement that gets guests initially involved; many of whom will then build the confidence for spontaneous engagement.



4.5 Event Attendance:

Networking

Attendee Expectations:

Attendees expect to meet new industry contacts, including not just attendees but speakers, sponsors, and VIPs.

Challenges:

You cannot always rely on attendees to network for themselves, especially with virtual and hybrid formats. Many attendees may feel uncomfortable talking with strangers, and as event host it's you that needs to facilitate and catalyse their connections. It was the great Maya Angelou who said, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." If the overall atmosphere is awkwardness, that's what guests will remember.

Opportunities:

Provide specific rooms for relaxed, organic socialising, but balance these with curated networking opportunities that can range from introduction sessions, friend-finding activities, games, competitions, and team projects. For virtual events, have dedicated "watercooler" hangout channels. In case conversation dies down, have a list of pre-prepared discussion prompts to hand. If ever a participant is alone in a room (virtual or otherwise), send in a team member – you can be sure of the attendee's gratitude.

4.6 Event Attendance:

Closing

Attendee Expectations:

Attendees expect to learn what comes next, how they can stay involved, and where they can find recordings and content from the event that is drawing to a close.

Challenges:

Most of the challenges of this touchpoint originate in forgetfulness or lack of preparation. Tired hosts might overlook mentioning where guests can find event recordings or forget to provide details on the next event. Furthermore, some attendees leave before the official end; they still need to receive this crucial information.

Opportunities:

Have a clear plan for your closing talks and all the vital info they should provide. Final impressions are almost as important as first impressions so use these talks as an opportunity to show how organised you are. Send the same information out via email not only as a reminder for guests who did attend but as a backup for guests who missed the closing talks. If you're tracking sub-event attendance, you can title your email by saying "You missed out on..."

5.1 Post-Event:

Thank-You Email

Attendee Expectations:

Attendees do not expect to be forgotten about and they do expect to be shown gratitude for their attendance.

Challenges:

If a thank-you email is too long, attendees simply won't read it. Having these emails drafted before an event or by someone who did not attend the event can come across as impersonal. The tone of the email should reflect the tone of the event and should be run against a checklist of important information and links to share.

Opportunities:

Once more, check that your emails are well formatted for all devices and browsers. Double check that the links are clickable and that viewing access is granted for the media files provided. Keep these emails personal, more so even than your pre-event emails. Address recipients as if they are now a member of your community.

5.2 Post-Event:

Survey

Attendee Expectations:

Attendees value feeling valued. They do not, however, want to give up endless hours of their life filling out a form of poorly thought-through questions.

Challenges:

Survey questions should be simple, relevant, and concise. Any longer than a few minutes to complete, and you will risk frustrating those who do finish it and losing crucial feedback from those who do not. Furthermore, poorly written email copy can result in a low-response rate. A lack of survey completion incentivisation can have the same effect, as can the absence of a justification as to why the questions are being asked.

Opportunities:

While surveys fulfil the function of vital data collection, the uses of that data should theoretically benefit the respondents too. After all, you will primarily use it to optimise your next event. Instead of framing surveys as invitees doing you a favour, use them as an opportunity to let attendees know that their opinions are valued. Remember to offer prize draws or gifts as incentives and phrase your select questions carefully so that you can quantify the data. Be transparent with the results, it builds community trust.



5.3 Post-Event:

On-Demand Content

Attendee Expectations:

Intuitively navigable on-demand pages containing relevant recordings and downloadable materials are now the norm.

Challenges:

Faulty links, low-quality recordings, non-traditional file formats, bulky file sizes, third-party platform logins – there are plenty of issues that can frustrate this touchpoint. If you fail to put in the time to check the process is straightforward, you will only lose more time later by having to individually solve problems on request and answer endless emails.

Opportunities:

As well as avoiding the challenges above, go beyond expectations by enriching event content with additional data, content, and sources for the facts and figures used. If you're sharing images, don't just offer them HD PNGs but web-ready JPGs that attendees can immediately use on their own channels. Actively distribute your content across different channels.

5.4 Post-Event:

On-Demand Content

Attendee Expectations:

If invited into a community, attendees will want to be told the benefits of joining with both clarity and honesty.

Challenges:

Unless the community has been discussed in advance, the invite will only confuse invitees. It should be during the event wherein the value of joining the community is first made clear, but now is the opportunity to hammer home that message and truly welcome new members. If you have barriers to joining the community, be they price or technical requirements, ensure they are not too high.

Opportunities:

The opportunity here is the expansion of your community, and in turn the brand loyalty that follows. The trick to achieving it is hyping it beforehand – at and before the event. After all, people lead busy digital lives; they won't join a community upon hearing about it for the first time. Have your speakers sing its praises and benefits so that attendees are intrigued by it before they are even official invitees. At the event, offer a few exclusives to community members so invitees won't want to miss out next time.

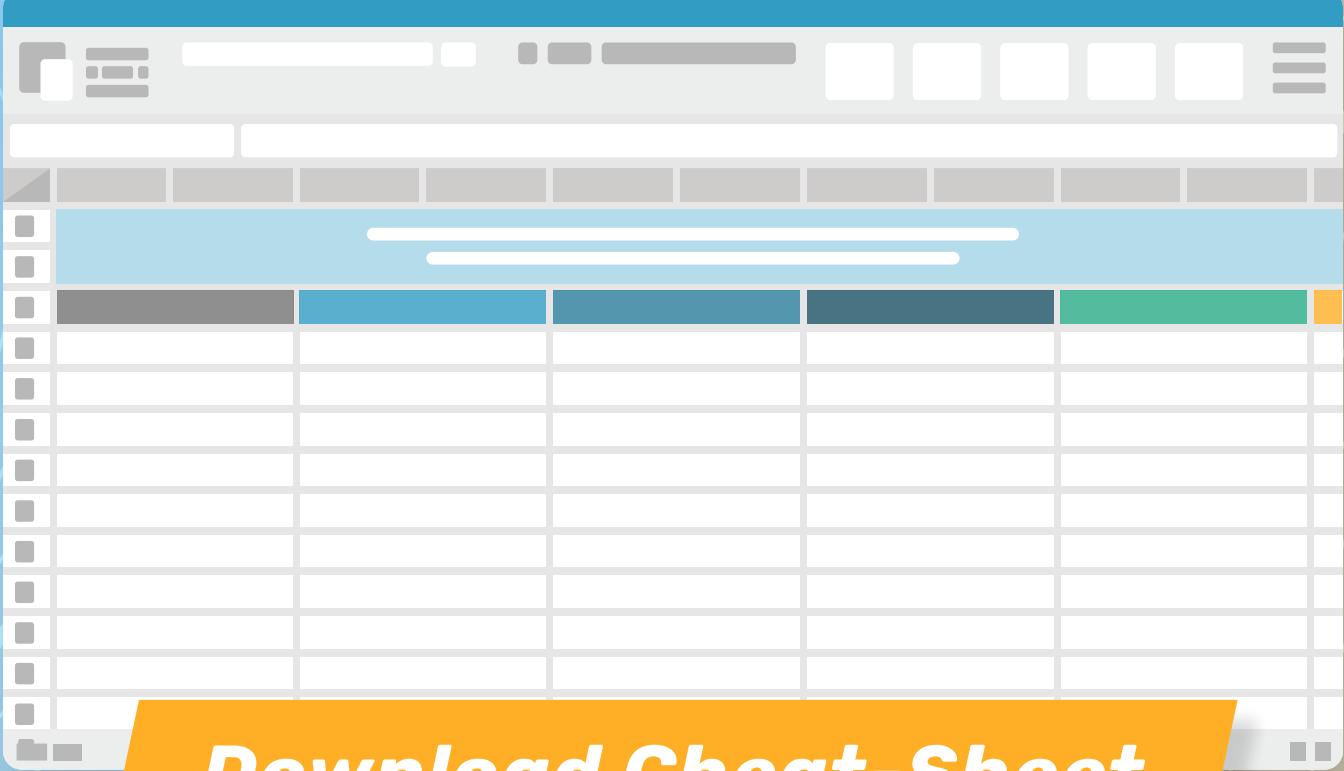


The Event

Attendee Journey

Mapping Cheat-Sheet

We recently threw an event (we practice what we preach) on the Frictionless Event Attendee Journey with speakers Florian Kühne, CEO of Sweap, and Francesca Rodriguez, co-founder of Balit and host of The Events Cast. Whether you have been linked here from that event or you've just accidentally stumbled upon gold, we're offering a free Event Attendee Journey Cheat-Sheet to help you streamline the phases laid out above.



Download Cheat-Sheet



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The Importance of Target Group Research, Segmentation, and Personalisation:

The secret to effective event attendee journey mapping is target group research and segmentation. Your audience will likely be complex. In order to value and appeal to them, you're going to need to segment them into smaller categories and build detailed data profiles for each. From there, you can create effective, personalised journeys for each segmented target subgroup.



Questions you will want to answer include:

- Has the attendee visited one of your events before?
- What is the attendee's position or job?
- Are they a VIP?
- Are they familiar with your brand?
- Are they already a converted customer?
- Will they want to contribute to the event?

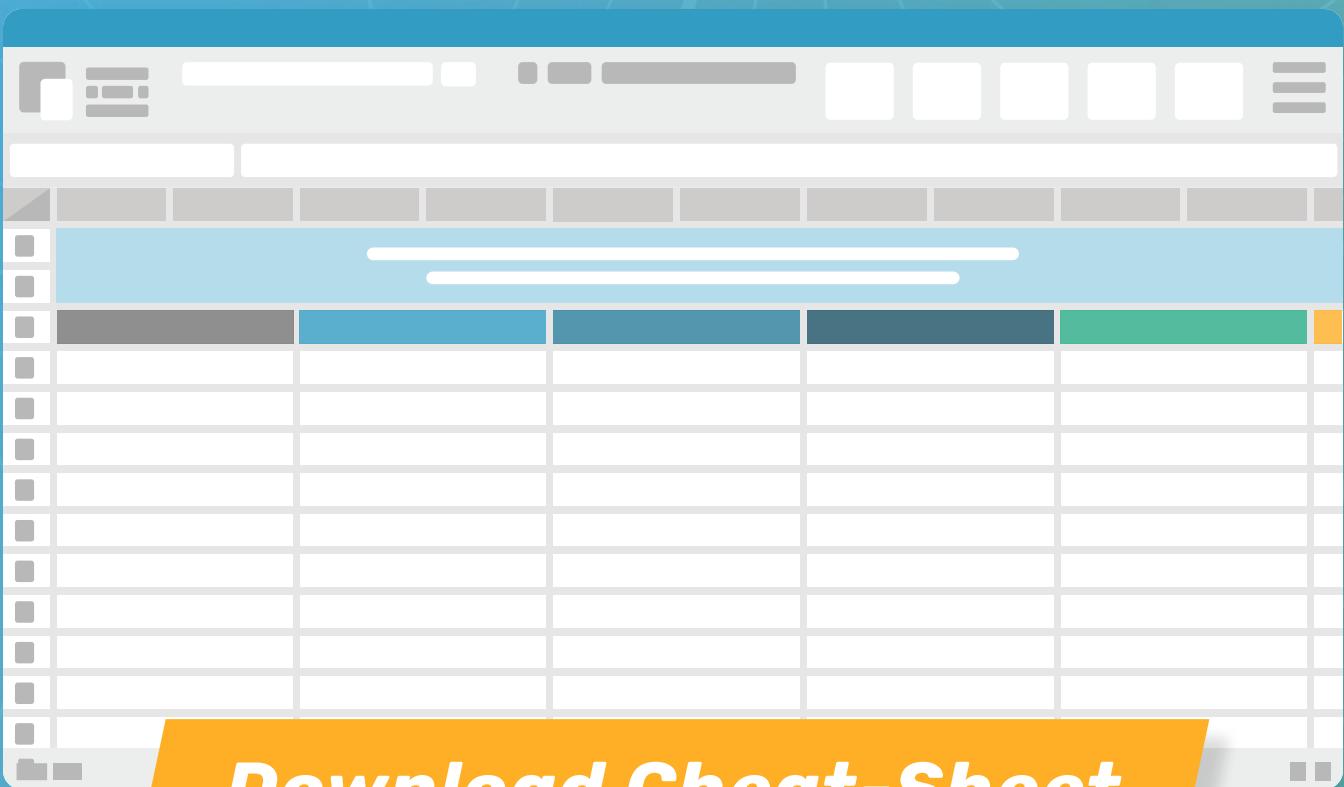
You can then make personalised communications for each subgroup and contact them in a way they will best respond to. A top tip is to give attendees control over their own event communication – by offering tick boxes for different communication types. This effectively allows your audience to segment themselves.

Every touchpoint following target group research should be aligned with these bespoke journeys. Some areas to personalise include: the registration process, communications, the event itself, sponsor interactions, and post-event interactions. For an example of the latter in action, imagine how differently attendees might feel in response to an email stating, "We saw you attended the ABC workshop at our XYZ event...". For some, this would be an impressive level of knowledge and attentiveness. For others, it would be an intrusive, even creepy, violation.

Conclusion

The best events are structured around well researched, well-planned, relevant, and meaningful event attendee journey maps. By following the steps that we have laid out, you will be able to avoid mishaps and transform the mediocre into the exceptional.

Attendee Journey Template



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