



Downtown Event Evaluation 101

Every downtown puts on events, but how do you choose which ones stay on the calendar and which ones never see the light of day? The best time to critique an event is while you are immersed in it. At no other time will you be as clear in your vision of what next year's event could be. If you decide to try out this On-The-Spot Event Evaluation technique, make sure you have comfy shoes, a thick skin and follow these handy tips:

Take the time to talk to people. Ask the attendees how they are enjoying the event. Was there anything else they hoped to see at the event? Would they attend if the event was held again? Stop by your businesses or vendors and check in. How are their sales? Was the event what they expected? Inevitably, you'll hear some negative comments. It's easy to get discouraged and defensive. Don't. Stop, listen and cherry-pick the most valuable information to assist in planning for future years.

Dissect everything. Even though you may have produced hundreds of downtown events, they can always be better. Look at signage, traffic flow, parking, amenities, ambiance - everything that goes into creating the event. Reflect on the advertising and PR that preceded this event. Did you get media coverage? Was the event media worthy?

Lightning doesn't always strike. There will be those events that are wildly successful from the moment they start. This is the exception, not the rule, so don't get frustrated if every event isn't a rollicking success the first time. On the other hand, it should never be a given that an event will continue just because it had moderate success. Set some benchmark questions that need to be answered before committing to another year:

- Did the event meet your goals? (Increased foot traffic, ringing the register, fundraising, friend-building)
- Were able to execute the event within budget without cutting corners?
- Was it worth the time spent (planning & execution)?

The final question you need to answer - Is it sustainable? Does the event have enough appeal to build on for future years or is it a "one-time, wham-bam, thank you ma'am" kind of thing? You don't want to get in the business of trying out new events until one sticks. That does nothing for your credibility and confuses your audience.

The art of downtown event planning lies in the ability to design events that connect people with your place, creating memories and feelings that will last long after the event is over. It's never about the number of events, but rather the quality and distinctiveness of your events that contribute to the overall downtown experience you are striving to deliver every day.