

Can It Be Better?

START BY RETHINKING YOUR EVENT

event **360**

**White Paper
Series**

VOLUME 1

What We Think About When We Rethink Our Event

As you were executing this year's event, you were planning for next time. It's what you (and all of us involved in event production) do: plan and see an event unfold while noting the areas to change or improve upon the next time around. But it's not just about making notes. Thinking about and rethinking next year's event is a process that can, at times, seem daunting and overwhelming. However, the process is manageable when you break it down into steps, and the time you take in the off-season to think about and rethink your event will pay enormous dividends the following season.

Below is the rethinking process step-by-step, so that you can effectively navigate these crucial steps in planning for next year and invigorating your event in 2019.

1 Open the Floodgates: Gather feedback from key stakeholders.

After the event, you invite feedback from all key stakeholders: event participants, volunteers and organizational staff. The feedback-gathering stage is vital because how you see the event may not be how others—even your own staff—see the event. A carefully crafted online survey and/or focus group will yield invaluable data and feedback from your event participants and volunteers. Staff members must also be included in this process and invited to share their insights from the season.

SURVEY TIP: *A well-constructed survey will limit the open-ended or free-form response to one or two questions and will be placed at the very end of the survey or as an optional field after a negative rating to provide more context.*

2 Sift & Organize: Collate the data and feedback for analysis and review.

This can be the most difficult and time-consuming part of the process. However, the attention you give to poring over the data and organizing it will greatly expedite and inform your discussions and planning for next year's event. Give some careful thought to how the information is presented and make sure to include feedback from staff that can be shared with the larger group.

ORGANIZING TIP: *Don't leave out disappointing or unexpected data or feedback. Framing these as opportunities for improvement will prompt your team to seek commonsense solutions.*

3 Make a Plan: Create a list of action items.

Using the data and feedback as touchstones for improvement along with your own notes and debrief, you and your team can create a list of action items and prioritize them according to feasibility, noting which items are essential for implementation in the following season. Prioritizing at this stage, while difficult, is crucial to make optimum use of your time and your staff's time.

REALITY CHECK #1: *Hopefully, you'll have some idea of next year's event budget because those numbers will help you prioritize your list and it will force you to seek innovative solutions that will maximize your ROI.*

REALITY CHECK #2: *Often a difficult or complex action item requires the expertise and effort of more than one or two people. In these instances, it is best to recruit a working group comprised of people who can help you work through the implementation of the action item. Breaking down a complex task into parts and delegating responsibility are time-tested ways to tackle a complicated action item.*

4 Update the SOP: Integrate your updates for next year.

Once you've settled on the changes you'll be making for next year's event, you will want to incorporate those changes into your Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). You have one, right? If you don't have an SOP, [check out this blog post](#). Doing so will not only memorialize and clarify how the action item will be executed, but it will also contextualize your proposed change and prompt you and your staff to examine how those changes will directly and indirectly affect other aspects of your event.

REVISION AND EVOLUTION OF AN IDEA:

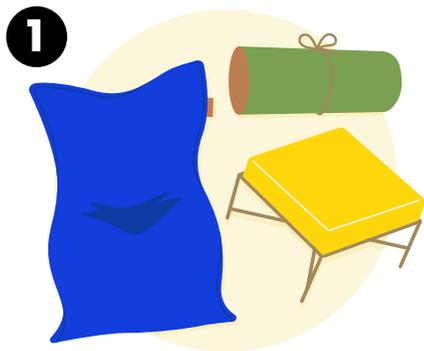
Don't be surprised if some of your action items need to be revised when they are added to your SOP, or even after that. Remember: it's a process, and your event has a great many moving parts.

5 Communicate with Key Stakeholders:

Once you've decided on your changes and incorporated them into your plan for the following year, the next step is to plan how to communicate these changes directly to key stakeholders. You will want to be selective and tactful about what you communicate and to whom. Some changes will be minor and not important for anyone other than you and a few staff members. Other changes may be more dramatic, so you will need to plan how to present those changes and anticipate how certain audiences will react. Taking some time to think through this step will help set expectations and smooth the way for implementation of your plans.

HOLDING BACK: *Sometimes you'll plan to make a fun change or upgrade that you will want to keep as a surprise for next year's participants (e.g., a new snack). Often, these little pleasant surprises will generate goodwill and good vibes that carry on after the event and will show up in your surveys and on social media.*

Five Changes That Came Out of Our Own Event Rethinking Process



Event Site Objective:

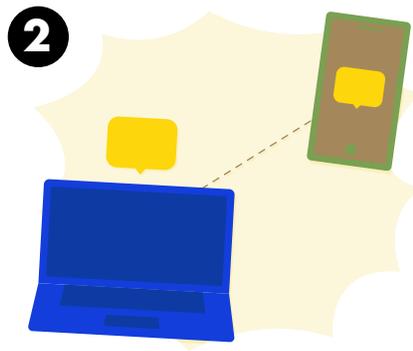
Make a rest, relaxation and recovery area more comfortable and welcoming for walkers who had just walked 20+ miles on the [Susan G. Komen 3-Day®](#) event series.

Solution:

Beanbags—in this instance, big, rugged beanbags from Fatboy®. The new lounging option proved to be a hit with weary walkers.

Participant Experience Takeaway:

Offering unique, upgraded or even slightly upscale seating options—bean bags, camp chairs, yoga mats, ottomans, or even folding chairs—are a way to show your participants that you appreciate their effort and care about their comfort and wellness. The extra consideration of their comfort will be appreciated.



Communications Objective:

Create more meaningful, timely and lasting connections with current, past, and lapsed event participants.

Solution:

[Hustle!](#) It's not a dance move or a command to get moving. It's a peer-to-peer text messaging platform and app that allows the user to engage a large audience and personalize the message. We use it as a conduit to create fruitful connections with event participants who we might not otherwise reach. [Read a review of how we use Hustle as a tool to engage participants.](#)

Participant Experience Takeaway:

Technology can enhance participant experience in a variety of direct and indirect ways. At Event 360, our event production staff have put hundreds of apps through their paces. [Here are some of the apps we use](#) to enhance participant experience by making the events safer, more efficient and more engaging.



Food Objective:

Food tastes and trends change as often as the seasons, so this is a perennial topic of rethinking for all Event 360 events.

Solutions:

3-Day walkers and crew loved the make-your-own trail mix bar provided at camp. When site restrictions precluded serving beer to MuckFest® participants, we found a local vendor to provide root-beer floats, and they were a huge hit. The magic of food trucks is no longer a secret, so we've engaged with local food trucks in markets across the country to provide local, fresh snacks and meals to grateful participants and guests.

Participant Experience Takeaway:

The way to an event participant's heart is sometimes through their stomach. Consequently, poor or scarce food choices will sometimes overshadow an otherwise solid event experience. Unless you received poor reviews about your food offerings, food upgrades or changes are something you might want to keep as a surprise, especially if it's something you feel confident that your participants will enjoy.



4 **Mission Messaging and Branding Objective:**

Advance the mission of the National MS Society by publicly honoring and paying tribute to top fundraisers and all fundraisers at the [MuckFest](#) event series. (Like on-event food offerings, branding and mission messaging are consistent subjects of rethinking year after year.)

Solutions:

Fundraising MuckFest participants receive personalized and branded tribute signs and branded medals. Top fundraising leader boards are maintained on the MuckFest website throughout the season, and fundraising participants in each wave are publicly acknowledged and thanked by the event emcee. All of these help promote a fundraising culture among event participants and advance the mission of the organization.

Participant Experience Takeaway:

When thinking about promoting a mission or advancing your brand, don't limit your thinking to signs, inflatable arches or other big gestures. Sometimes the smallest things have the biggest impact and create brand/organizational loyalty among event participants and their guests.



5 **Meaningful Spaces Objective:**

Provide spaces where event participants and guests can express why the event is meaningful for them.

Solutions:

On the Shatterproof events, a Memorial Gallery allows guests to memorialize loved ones lost to addiction, and the Celebrate Recovery Wall is where people in recovery can share and honor their stories. For the 3-Day, walkers, crew and guests can honor a lost loved one in a Remembrance Tent. On the MuckFest event, a wall called Why We Muck allows event participants to memorialize their commitment to the cause of ending multiple sclerosis.

Participant Experience Takeaway:

The main reason to hold an outdoor, cause-related event is provide a communal space for people to come together to express their hopes, their commitment to the cause, and even their sorrow. As event production professionals, it's our job to create those moments and those spaces where people can feel safe and free to express themselves.

A RECAP: The Five Questions You Should Be Asking When Thinking About Next Year's Event

- 1 Are the participant surveys and debriefs yielding results that generate ideas for improvement?
- 2 Am I getting valuable input from key stakeholders?
- 3 Are the survey data and feedback organized in a way to maximize thoughtful analysis?
- 4 Are the updates and changes thoughtfully integrated into the Standard Operating Procedure?
- 5 Were updates and changes communicated effectively to participants and key stakeholders?

Next season is here, and now is the time to think about and rethink your event.



If you're looking for some help with your event or with the process described above, **reach out to Jillian at 773.247.5360 x115 or jschranz@event360.com.**