

MACKENZIE STRATEGIC

Philanthropy.

INSIGHTS • IDEAS • INNOVATIONS



Galas in the 21st century

Are they worth it? Can they continue?
And where does the mission fit in?

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GALAS: A BLESSING OR A BUST?

A chance to schmooze with key donors, attract new potential supporters, announce big gifts and celebrate mission accomplishments? Or a vortex of ever-growing expense and glitzy competition? A gala can be either or both of these. It's all in how you handle it.



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Don't let the tide of party details sweep you away when planning your gala. Keep your mind on your mission and focus the details on the mission. You'll have a truly distinctive event, and you're likely to raise more money as well.



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THE FADING GALA: FIX IT OR RETIRE IT ALTOGETHER?

Does your gala do something for your charity that no other event or tactic can do. If your answer is "no," then it's time to do something else. But if the answer is "Yes," or "Yes, it could if ...," there may be hope for renewal. A tighter statement of goals and performance expectations, a relentless focus on mission, and some refreshed logistics, and you may revive that fading gala.

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Letter

from Carol Bezaire

Welcome to the FOURTH issue of *Mackenzie Strategic Philanthropy*.

This edition deals with effective fundraising strategies for galas – those special events with a price that your audience considers to be a “big ticket.” They can be pretty exhausting to co-ordinate and deliver, so it’s a good plan to evaluate your efforts and make sure your gala is delivering the benefits you need.

Looking at what works and what doesn’t work in changing economic times and among different demographics can help you decide what form your special event will take. As social and professional life become more casual and the traditional gala audience ages, for example, you may face the challenge of planning a suitable event for a younger, hipper audience.

Examining every aspect of your gala will improve its ROI in future years. In this issue, we will examine a number of aspects that can help you evaluate your gala from all angles. Some of these are:

- What is the most important thing for the success of our gala?
- How can we identify the hidden costs and benefits of our gala?
- How can we set ourselves apart from all the other galas in town?
- Is it okay to make branding or friend-raising as important as fundraising?
- Based on last year’s results, how would we change next year’s gala?
- What are our goals for the gala, and is a gala the most effective way to achieve our goals?

This issue addresses the trends and effectiveness of galas from a number of different perspectives, and relies on the insights of organizers, volunteers and guests. From simple tips to overarching strategies, we hope to provide you with a variety of tools to start, refresh or even replace the gala you may be planning now.

If you would prefer hard copies of this publication, or want to catch up on our initial three issues for your board, please select the “Order printed copies” option on the home page of our website.

Please spread the word about *Mackenzie Strategic Philanthropy*!



- **Carol Bezaire**

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WE ACKNOWLEDGE WITH GRATITUDE THOSE WHO SHARED THEIR INSIGHTS THROUGH INTERVIEWS RECORDED IN THIS ISSUE OF *MACKENZIE STRATEGIC PHILANTHROPY*:

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- Elaine Wong, *Manager, Community Engagement, Ernestine's Women's Shelter*
- Association of Fundraising Professionals *2014 Special Events Report*

Stats&facts

54%



of respondents hold
1-4 special events per year

Galas are the **most frequently** held event — **75%** of respondents hold them.

57% with a live and/or silent auction

18% without an auction



% of annual revenue from special events

(including galas, a-thons, others such as duck races, sports tournaments, meetings with organization leaders)

15%

5-9% of annual revenue

15%

10-19% of annual revenue

8%

20-29% of annual revenue

9%

30-49% of annual revenue

12%

50%+ of annual revenue

6%

Don't know/no answer

Cost per dollar raised in galas



Less than \$.20 **13%**

\$.20-\$.39 **18%**

\$.40-\$.59 **15%**

\$.60-\$.79 **4%**

\$.80-\$.99 **3%**

More than \$1 **1%**

Don't know **21%**

No answer **26%**



GALAS: a **BLESSING** or a **BUST**?

Are galas a great way to schmooze with some key donors, attract new potential supporters, announce transformational gifts and celebrate your mission accomplishments? Or are they over-the-top time-suckers luring you into a vortex of ever-growing expense and glitzy competition with more prominent charities?

Yes and yes. Everything depends on how you handle your gala and what you expect from it. What cannot be argued is that galas are changing. Your mom and dad's gala isn't compelling or memorable for most younger donors. And even your mom and dad's expectations have changed over the years, thanks to the flood of demands for charity transparency and effectiveness.

GALAS' VALUE MORE EVIDENT TO THOSE WHO KNOW CHARITIES

Marketing maven Seth Godin's views are a red flag for charities. He's sophisticated in the ways of business, but not necessarily of charity. And his **views** are typical of business people who haven't seen charities from the front lines or the boardroom table:

The gala is held in a reasonably enjoyable venue, with lots of money spent on wine and food and such, all to benefit the attendees, not the charity. The inviter gets the social gratification of hosting, plus the added benefit of feeling charitable. The guest gets the social benefit of being included in this stratum of society, of having an excuse for a night out and possibly the commercial benefit (lawyers, brokers, etc.) of being part of a trusted circle.

Again, none of this benefits the charity. And having a big donor pay for the whole thing changes nothing. For this reason, the gala is actually corrupting. Attendees are usually driven by social and personal motivations to attend, and thus the philanthropic element of giving — just to give — is removed.

Experienced philanthropists and charity leaders understand that a thoughtfully planned gala accomplishes much more than social networking. But that's the catch — you have to be an insider to understand what galas can do for a charity. For those unacquainted with charity fundraising and marketing, galas can seem like a colossal, ego-driven waste of time and money.

WATCHDOGS GROWL ABOUT COSTS, DISTRACTIONS

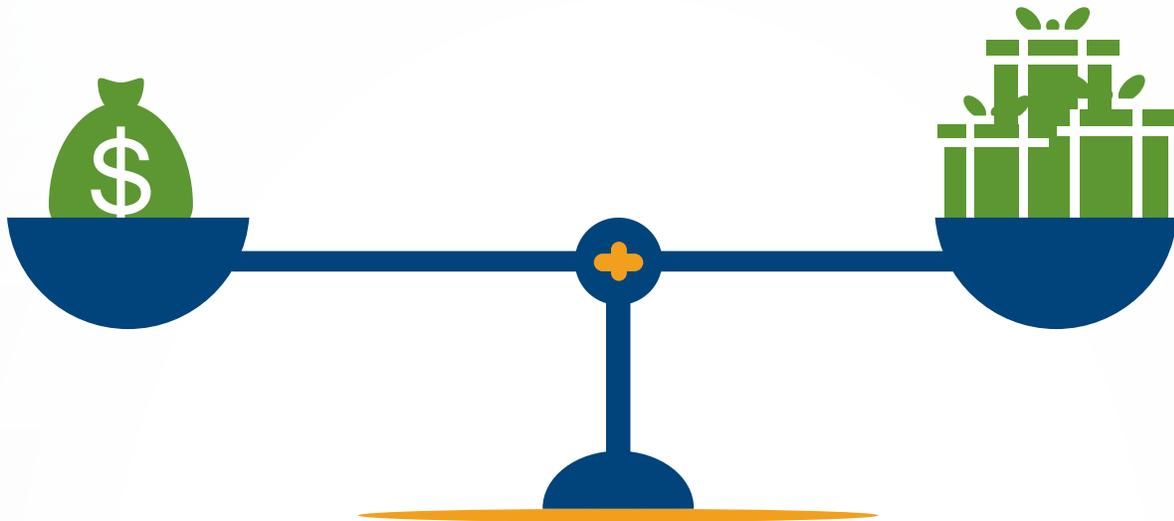
Like Godin, charity watchdogs generally take a dim view of galas. This excerpt from Charity Navigator's **Holiday Giving Guide** sums up their perspective:

Skip the gala and write a check: *Special events, such as galas and golf outings, are notoriously inefficient ways to raise money for a charity. Not only are these events outright costly (invitations, catering, entertainment and so on), but planning a fancy ball often diverts staff time away from the charity's mission. So if you really want to help fund a charity's operations, then stay home, reheat your leftovers and write a big check directly to the charity.*

Now charity watchdogs aren't known for their sense of fun — or even for their awareness of the complexities of fundraising, major donor stewardship and relationship development. They haven't yet realized that, when done well, galas can contribute to your goals in all those areas, focus on your mission and achieve a respectable return as well.

We hope that when your next gala comes round, you'll be able to make some positive changes based on what you read in this issue of *Mackenzie Strategic Philanthropy*. Above all, we hope that when you make those changes, your guests will leave saying things like:

- *What a great evening! I had no idea ABC Charity made such a difference!*
- *We're just delighted to support your work. Next year, we'd like to bring our company's president.*
- *And from your Millennial guests — Awesome evening with @ABCcharity. Tks for chance to meet such inspiring people! #makingadifference. ■*



That *pesky* ROI

When the Association of Fundraising Professionals surveyed its members for its *2014 Special Events Report*, an astonishing 21 per cent said they didn't know the cost per dollar raised on their galas. A further 26 per cent just didn't answer the question. Did they not know, or were they ashamed to report?

Either way, that's almost half of the respondents. Now you may focus entirely on the bottom line, holding your gala to the thrifty standard of less than 20 cents per dollar raised, as 13 per cent of respondents did. Or you may decide that the goals of friendraising and publicity are just as significant, and allow a higher cost ratio. Then there's the question of how well and how long you track gift outcomes – when someone is introduced to your charity at your gala and makes a major gift five years later, can you trace the connection?

But what matters most is that you *know* what it costs to plan and execute your gala, including the value of time that could have been spent on other work.

THE BOTH/AND PERSPECTIVE

Calgary Urban Project Society

(CUPS) Senior Director Robert Perry sits comfortably in both camps. “Our gala is a seed, even if guests don’t write a cheque that night,” he explains. “They might influence corporate donations, for instance. Invitations are distributed entirely through our Board members, so the room is full of Calgary movers and shakers. Those people are linked to significant giving decisions, both personal and corporate.”

But Perry has an eye firmly on the bottom line. Several years ago, CUPS replaced its usual silent auction with an auction of items needed for CUPS, such as a new bus. When that became stale, he explains, they just asked straight out, selling outcomes such as “X dollars will improve the health of x children in our programs in the following ways.”

Unlike some special event fundraisers, he’s not worried that the average age in the room is well above 40. The gala is expected to raise significant money. Since tickets at \$200 to \$250 are just the beginning of the opportunities to contribute that evening, he seeks the demographic that can afford such an outlay. ■

NUMBERS TO THINK ABOUT

Here are a few things to consider when you evaluate the worth of your gala:



Have you captured all the costs, including staff time?

Have you considered the opportunity cost of what those staff members and volunteers could have accomplished instead of a gala?



Do in-kind gifts make your gala financially feasible – space, food, decorations?

How much would they cost you to replace? Do you have alternative sources or a different plan in case you lose that support in the future?



How many guests are committed donors?

How many become committed donors? What is your strategy for using your gala to increase your fundraising beyond that one night? How will you track the connections between the gala and future gifts?



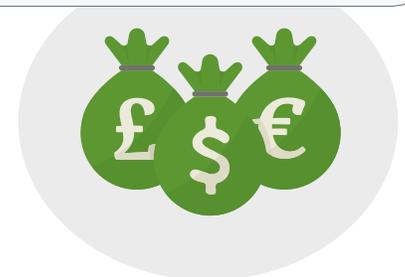
Is your revenue diversified,

or are you unduly dependent on one special event that could be torpedoed by anything: glitzier competition, changing demographics and tastes, an economic slowdown, even bad weather?



If you mount a gala primarily for branding reasons, how do you measure its success?

When people are “more aware” of you, how will their behaviour change in ways that help to achieve your strategic objectives? Are you sure that a gala is the most cost-effective way to achieve that result?.



“Our gala is a seed, even if guests don’t write a cheque that night...They might influence corporate donations.”





MAKE YOUR MISSION
the

MAIN ATTRACTION

THE LOGISTICS OF A GALA CAN BE OVERWHELMING FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS. THE VENUE, THE DECOR, THE THEME, THE TICKET SALES, THE FLOWERS, THE ENTERTAINMENT, THE PROGRAM, THE SILENT AUCTION, THE BALLOON POP, THE RAFFLES, THE PRESS COVERAGE — IT'S EASY TO ALLOW THAT TORRENT OF DETAIL TO DROWN WHAT OUGHT TO BE THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION AT THE EVENT: YOUR MISSION.

“What?” you say. “Galas are supposed to raise money, make friends and give people a good time.”

Yes, they are. And the best way to do all of that is to showcase what your guests and other donors have done, and could do, through supporting your work. Your guests want that even more than they want to eat, dance and socialize.

GUESTS ASKED FOR MORE MISSION INFORMATION

“We took a hard look at our guest feedback three years ago,” says **motionball** chair Paul Etherington. “One guest told us flat out that they didn’t feel immersed in the **Special Olympics** movement and didn’t know what they were celebrating. We realized that our gala wasn’t

as effective as our other events at displaying our mandate – to integrate, educate and celebrate. We made the education piece a top priority, as it is with our other events.”

Motionball has ramped up the presence, stories and involvement of Special Olympics athletes during the gala. Two dozen or so athletes attend, wearing their uniforms and medals. Like celebrities, they are introduced from the stage. Player cards distributed to all guests describe their athletic achievements and the other facets of their lives — jobs, hobbies and volunteer involvement.

The athletes act as advocates for Special Olympics as well. At the VIP reception, they visit each sponsor booth to share their life stories and

“Guests come first and foremost because of their connection to the cause... they bring their friends for an evening out, but also because they want to show them why Ernestine’s is so important to them. Now that we’re doing more of that, it’s definitely a livelier, even rowdier evening, and still lots of fun.”

— **ELAINE WONG,**
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
MANAGER, ERNESTINE’S
WOMEN’S SHELTER

help sponsors understand what their money accomplishes. The honorary chair, a Special Olympics athlete, tells his own story from the stage. In an echo of proposals via the stadium screen, last year's honorary chair proposed to his girlfriend, also a Special Olympics athlete, from the stage.

"Paying guests are now getting to know the Special Olympic athletes because the athletes are there mingling just like everyone else," Etherington comments.

EDUCATE YOUR PERFORMERS; LET THEM EDUCATE YOUR CROWD

Calgary Urban Project Society (CUPS) equips its gala's guest artist to forge the primary link to its mission. CUPS selects artists, such as Jann Arden, Holly Cole and Jim Cuddy, who are not "head-banging loud," explains senior director Robert Perry. Each year, the performer arrives at least a day early, in time for an orientation and site visit in the child development centre. A videographer records everything as the performer meets the children, plays with them and reads them stories.

"All these artists have a song about redemption," Perry says. "Because of our gala's intimate nature, people really pay attention to the performance. When the singer does

their redemption song, and that video rolls in the background, you can hear a pin drop. It has a huge impact."

HEAR, SEE, TASTE YOUR MISSION

Nonprofit management professor and frequent gala guest Alex Gill recalls a gala he attended in London for a charity working with the visually impaired. Guests ate one course of their meal blindfolded. "That worked much better than a speech from the podium," he recalls. "You actually experienced the issue yourself."

An event for **True Patriot Love**, an organization that benefits military families, featured an armoured personnel carrier in the auction area and a speech by a soldier who had been injured by an IED. "It really drove home the message that others have sacrificed so that you can have the life you're enjoying," Gill says.

TOO GRIM FOR A FUN-FILLED EVENING?

Are you concerned that your cause is too grim to spotlight at a party? Don't be. Community engagement manager Elaine Wong of **Ernestine's Women's Shelter** is thrilled with guest response to Ernestine's most recent gala, where every aspect had been reviewed to focus it more tightly on violence against women.





“...you don’t have to be a large organization with a big gala budget to turn your evening into a storytelling opportunity”

“Feedback from guests in previous years was that they wanted to hear more client stories and more about our programs,” Wong says. “We found ways to do that without sounding heavy and gloomy. For example, our centrepieces are usually lovely donated flowers.

This year, we used bowls of fortune cookies with messages that were a mixture of statistics and quotes from clients. When guests read their fortunes aloud, as people always do, everyone at the table learned more about Ernestine’s. And this year we chose our host because of her well-known feminist perspective as well as her ability to serve as MC.”

For some years, Ernestine’s gala MC had appealed for donations from the stage. There was always a specific item connected to each amount — transportation perhaps, or a child’s birthday party. This

year, Ernestine’s linked each donation to a client’s journey. When the MC asked for \$120 for a counsellor to accompany a client to court, for example, one of Ernestine’s counsellors described that experience.

“The guest response to that was overwhelming,” Wong recalls. “We may actually have left money in the room because we weren’t equipped to handle such strong response.”

“Guests come first and foremost because of their connection to the cause,” she continues. “They bring their friends for an evening out, but also because they want to show them why Ernestine’s is so important to them. Now that we’re doing more of that, it’s definitely a livelier, even rowdier evening, and still lots of fun.”

Ernestine’s experience shows that you don’t have to be a large organization with a big gala budget to turn your evening into a storytelling opportunity. Any charity – and your charity – can choose to make mission the centrepiece of a special event. Your guests will enjoy it more, and you just might raise even more money for your mission. ■



A next-generation organizer **SHARES** his **TIPS**

Times certainly have changed in the last decade when it comes to charity galas. It seems like every charity - big and small - now has some form of gala, and for good reason. Done properly, galas can be a great way to raise a lot of money in one evening to support your cause.

I've led the **Regent Park gala** committee for two years on behalf of **www.3to6team.org**, a group of young professionals who work with the Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment Foundation to fund after-school programs for over 3,000 youth in the Regent Park area of Toronto. I hope this article will give you some insight into what organizers think about.



THE BIG DRAW

Every gala today needs some draw to the event, whether it's a local act, singer, or entertainer. If it's a focused gala with a targeted audience, this may not be as important, but if it's a gala where ticket sales will be open to the public, a strong entertainer or act will clearly help sell tickets, raise money for the charity and create a strong "buzz" about the event.



THE COST

Depending on who you are trying to target, the price point is incredibly crucial. Make it too expensive and you may lose your target market. Make it too cheap, and the attendees may not feel the pressure to buy tickets until the very end, which is an organizer's nightmare. Today, for the young professional audience, gala prices generally range from \$85 to \$150.



THE VALUE

The next logical item on this list would then be the value. As a guest, do I perceive I'm getting value for the money I paid for the ticket? Yes the money is going to charity, but guests still need to feel that their time and money were well spent. Difference-makers in this category could be items like an open bar, food service, celebrities in attendance, a good Silent Auction, and grab bags at the end of the evening, to name a few.



THE VENUE

Location certainly does play a factor in drawing people to the event. Many organizers spend a little more in order to be in a "trendy" location or new venue. It's always tough to gauge precisely if that affects the amount raised and if the cost is worth it in the end, but it is something to keep in mind.



THE BRAND

Galas are great because, done properly, they can be a consistent part of the guests' social calendars every year. Easier said than done, of course. But if guests leave feeling they were a part of something special, had a great time "partying for a good cause," and tell their friends about it the next day, then the event has accomplished what guests had hoped for. ■



GALAS FOR MILLENNIALS

Lose the **word**, not the **concept**

“Clearly, the era of flashy and formal black-tie fundraisers . . . is over. Today, organizers are appealing to a younger generation with fundraisers that feel more spontaneous and laid-back, such as salon-style events in private homes.” So says *The Globe & Mail* in a May 2013 article entitled ***Why Toronto is saying good-bye to galas.***

“WE HAVE TO KEEP IT FRESH, WE DON’T WANT TO AGE WITH OUR DEMOGRAPHIC. AND IF YOU’RE COMMITTED TO THAT AGE GROUP, YOU HAVE TO ACCEPT THAT YOU’RE LIMITED IN WHAT YOU CAN RAISE.”

— PAUL ETHERINGTON, CHAIRMAN AND CO-FOUNDER, MOTIONBALL FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS



Despite that pronouncement, there is no doubt that traditional galas are still working, especially for the hospital sector. But the gala crowd is aging. Smart event organizers have begun looking ahead, crafting events that retain the elements of elegance and dress-up, but are much trendier and more youthful. And the creativity and affordability of these events just might stimulate some renewal in the traditional gala market as well.

Social entrepreneur and consultant Alex Gill is the founder of Mendicant Group, a Toronto-based consultancy that works with charities around the world. He is also the Social Innovator in Residence at Ryerson University. Supporting his company’s clients and his own philanthropic interests takes him to many galas each year. He’s seen some good examples of Millennial and Gen X-targeted events that aren’t always called galas, but are very special nonetheless.

KEEP IT AFFORDABLE

One event that impressed him was **Tie One On**, an auction of celebrity ties and scarves benefitting **Homes First**. Gill describes it as an “un-gala gala” with some of the usual elements (glamour, speeches, a silent auction, a bar and music) but with a “much hipper, cool vibe.” He estimates the guests’ median age at 28. Tickets were an affordable \$50 and with drinks and hors-d’oeuvres rather than a sit-down dinner, the event encouraged mingling, networking, and of course, bidding in the live and silent auctions.

Paul Etherington chairs Toronto’s **motionball**, a gala supporting **Special Olympics** and aimed at young professionals. “My parents have done galas for many years, the expensive ones,” he reflects. “Ours is a bit different from the usual gala.”

It’s certainly large. Motionball attracts 2,200 guests, with VIP tickets priced at \$350. General tickets at \$150 are certainly within range for young professionals, and more so if they buy soon enough to claim an early bird ticket (\$100).

Though the event skews young, the VIP portion attracts older guests as well. “The VIP age range is between 30 and 65,” Etherington explains. “We find that the variety works well. They enjoy one another, and everyone enjoys walking around to the food stations, the live music, the silent auction, and the Special Olympics athletes present at the booths for sponsors. Young

professionals also appreciate the chance to network with CEOs.”

ACCEPT FUNDRAISING LIMITS WHEN TARGETING MILLENNIALS

The general party begins at 9 pm with food and a live auction in one room and a dance party in the other. Most of the guests are general rather than VIPs. Etherington gives full credit for the impressive guest numbers to the event’s 20-member ticket committee, which is completely replaced each year to bring in new networks.

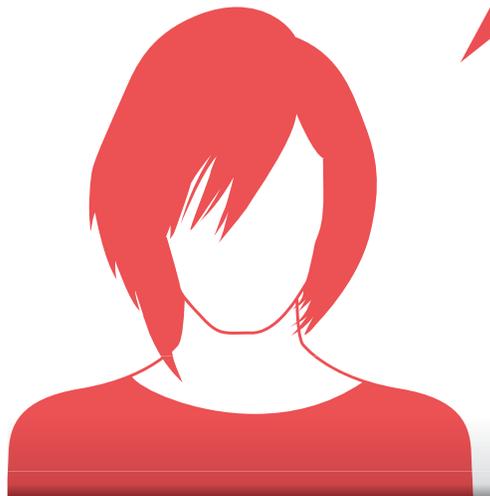
“We have to keep it fresh,” he explains. “We don’t want to age with our demographic. And if you’re committed to that age group, you have to accept that you’re limited in what you can raise. I’m 37, but we have core committee members who are 24 or 25 years old who bring a fresh new look to the event and the movement. More organizations need to think that way.” That’s a key insight, whether your event is large or intimate.

Etherington has attended other galas that appeal to the young (or young at heart). They feature non-traditional venues and themes. None of them, he recalls, had the usual glossy invitation. Instead, event materials emphasize hipness while reminding guests that dressing up will make the evening special.

You may even want to throw out the gala mentality altogether as you reach out to younger supporters and potential donors. Shauna Klein of the **Child Development Institute** is careful to refer to her \$150 event as a cocktail party rather than a gala. And the Globe and Mail article heralding the “end” of galas described an Eco-Charity Mixer in support of Sick Kids Foundation that cost just \$30, with silent auction items between \$7 and \$70.

Don’t worry about making mistakes as you court a guest demographic that may be new to you. They’re very forgiving, as long as you listen. “We’ve done everything wrong at some point,” Etherington admits, “but we come out of it by listening to the demographic we want to engage.” ■

DON’T WORRY ABOUT MAKING MISTAKES AS YOU COURT A GUEST DEMOGRAPHIC THAT MAY BE NEW TO YOU. THEY’RE VERY FORGIVING, AS LONG AS YOU LISTEN.



THE *FADING* GALA



FIX IT OR RETIRE IT ALTOGETHER?

Is your gala in trouble? Perhaps it's bringing in less money than it did a few years ago. Long-time sponsors are reducing their involvement or pulling out altogether. Guests who have attended for years are voting with their feet and their wallets. Maybe there's more competition – not just other galas but anything memorable that your potential guests could do with the same amount of money.

SHOULD YOU EVEN HAVE A GALA?

Should you have a gala at all? Social entrepreneur and nonprofit consultant Alex Gill believes that galas are “indispensable for the foreseeable future.” But they have to change, he says. It starts by knowing why you need to do it – what a gala can do for your charity that no other event or tactic can achieve. Understanding the purpose will help you set goals or key performance indicators for the event.

HOW TO REVIVE A DECLINING GALA

Then, he advises, do everything you can to differentiate your event from every other gala in town:

- **Focus on creative tactics to highlight your mission.** You can find more about that in *Make Your Mission the Main Attraction* on page 7.
- **Review your date** – are you scheduled too close to something similar?
- **Attend other galas.** If they are successful, you might even approach someone from another gala's organizing committee to join (or at least mentor your committee).

Finally, look at all your logistics. Where can you be more creative, even unique? Gill describes a Chicago gala, **The Eve of the Eve**, that plays into, yet avoids, a traditional date for festivities. In any North American city, there's a lot to do on New Year's Eve – and, of course, the competition extends to private events, parties in homes, or just staying in with your family and a pizza.

By claiming December 30 instead, The Eve of the Eve takes full advantage of the holiday mood and the year-end spirit of giving. Holding the party in the spacious, beautifully restored Union Station allows plenty of room for 2,000 guests. Both the venue and the date add an element of hipness, which is reinforced in advertising copy that clearly targets young, urban professionals.

STAND UP AND GRAZE

Freeing yourself from the tyranny of the sit-down dinner allows almost unlimited scope for gala redesign. You can still feed your guests well with plentiful hors d'oeuvres, food stations, tapas and sampling. Keeping guests on the move allows your staff, board and clientele to circulate as well, sharing their stories in compelling



UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE (OF YOUR EVENT) WILL HELP YOU SET GOALS OR KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR THE EVENT

personal conversations. Guests of any age value the chance to make new business and social connections.

CASE STUDY: SMALL AND SUCCESSFUL

You don't have to be a large charity to put these ideas into practice. Let's zero in on a successful evening fundraiser for a smaller charity, the **Child Development Institute** (CDI — annual fundraising from all sources, \$600,000).

One of the CDI's programs, Taste of Home, teaches children living in shelters to prepare healthy, budget-friendly meals. With the help of a corporate sponsor, CDI created a cookbook from the Taste of Home recipes. The next step was to build a special event to support the program.

Shauna Klein, who directs fund development, marketing and communications for CDI, is careful to describe the event as a cocktail party rather than a gala. Using that language sends a different message: it's still a party, but not as formal or intimidating as a gala might be to a first-time guest. One hundred and twenty-five guests aged 35 and up gathered, not in a convention centre or a hotel, but in a corporate boardroom suite.

"There's a lot of interest in doing it next year...but it depends on which programs need to be supported. We're more successful if we craft events based on the specific programs we want to support."

— **SHAUNA KLEIN,**
FUNDRAISING, MARKETING
AND COMMUNICATIONS
DIRECTOR, CDI

There, seven well-known chefs who had created gourmet versions of the recipes in the Taste of Home cookbook served their creations at food stations located throughout the venue. A bartender created a signature cocktail for the event.

ASK THE "REPEAT?" QUESTION EVERY YEAR

The ticket price, \$150, signalled gala status while still being affordable compared to competing events. Thanks to the donations of space, food and the chefs' time, the brand-new event raised a significant amount of money. It attracted new people to CDI's network — people who bought tickets because they

were fans of the chefs involved. Some of the chefs expressed interest in working with the children in the Taste of Home program. Yet even with all that success, CDI doesn't intend to repeat automatically next year.

"There's a lot of interest in doing it next year," Klein says, "but it depends on which programs need to be supported. We're more successful if we craft events based on the specific programs we want to support."

And there, in a nutshell, is the recipe for gala success. Start with your mission. Set your goals. Know who you want to attract and why. Make sure you have sponsors. Differentiate your event through its creativity. Commit to objective evaluation. In short, handle your gala as you would any other fundraising or marketing campaign.

And don't forget to have a wonderful time celebrating your mission. ■

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