

insights

The ultimate guide to running school events

↳ Learn how to plan and manage school events like a pro!



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Let's get started!

According to Aventri's 2021 Event Marketing Guide, 31% of marketers believe that events are the **single most effective marketing channel**. That's right — even after most events moved online after the events of 2020, marketers still believe that events are more effective than digital advertising, email marketing, or content marketing!

When it comes to school events, most marketers and admissions staff will attest that they're a great way to engage prospective families and strengthen relationships with your existing school community. Achieving those goals involves a little bit of strategy and a *lot* of planning.

Ready to level up your school events strategy? In this guide, we'll break down all of the elements that are involved in running successful school events — from scheduling and organising to marketing and managing, we've got you covered.



01



Create a winning events strategy

Just like you plan most marketing activities well in advance, it's important to have an events calendar in place for your **entire school year**. Planning your events calendar this way might seem like a huge undertaking at first, but trust us, it's well worth the effort.

When you're looking at filling your calendar, it's a good idea to consider a broad mix of **school event ideas**, including days that are open to the whole community and targeted at specific audience segments. A diverse portfolio of events can help to:

- Drive interest in your school
- Strengthen your school community
- Nudge prospective families toward enrolling their children at your school

When you're deciding on the types of events to include, it's important to think about all of the different stakeholders within your school and create a balanced mix of events for current students, prospective families, alumni, and staff.

Schedule your recurring event dates

To get started, set aside dates for any annual or regularly occurring events in your calendar. An example of these events might include:



- Open days or your school fete
- Inaugural masses or other religious celebrations
- Swimming, cross country and athletics carnivals
- Graduation ceremonies
- School anniversaries

When selecting an event date, it's always a good idea to have a backup, just in case the first one doesn't work with your yearly event calendar. Once you've allocated dates for your recurring events you can start to research new event ideas to fill your calendar.

Set your overall events KPIs

The best way to ensure your events are a success is to have clear goals that your whole calendar will work towards. Breaking even on your events budget will obviously be a top priority, but there are other objectives you can set that'll help to shape your strategy.

Some examples of event strategy objectives include:

- Bringing new audiences or demographics into your school community
- Increasing event attendance or overall event satisfaction
- Encouraging more donations to your school charities, equipment, facilities or projects
- Increasing enrolment enquiries

Once you have set your key objectives, you can move on to planning individual events that will work towards one or more. Some engaging event ideas include celebrating awareness days, student showcases, interactive Q&A sessions, information nights, and networking events for families or staff.

Virtual vs. in-person events

It's clear that virtual events have become a popular alternative to traditional, in-person events. There's no question that both event types can be effective for schools, but it's important to keep in mind that they require different planning, marketing, and organisational techniques.

If you're organising a virtual event you'll need to use a platform that attendees can easily access. Several different digital platforms can be used to host online events, with Zoom and YouTube Live among the most popular.



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Kickstart your event planning

Once your strategy is in place, depending on the size and scale of your events, it's best to allow a lead time of around four to six months to plan for each event. This time frame allows you to comfortably organise your event, without the stress of securing suppliers or staff at the last minute.

Create your event KPIs

We discussed your event strategy objectives — now it's time to get even more granular and set key performance indicators (KPIs) for each event. There are some standard KPIs that you may wish to set for each event, including:

- Attendance goals — this might be tied to a particular number of attendees, or it could be based on ensuring certain members of your community attend.
- Satisfaction goals — this will likely be measured by sending out a survey at the end of the event to gauge whether your attendees enjoyed themselves or not.
- Financial goals — this could be related to ticket sales or it could be a fundraising amount that you'd like to reach.

If you're organising an event for another purpose (for example, to welcome new parents into your community), you will need to think of appropriate KPIs to measure whether you achieved your goals on the day.



Set your event budget

A well-researched budget allows you to plan for the size and complexity of your event. To set a budget, you can refer back to past events or start from scratch by reaching out to vendors for a quote for each element that your event needs. It's a good idea to try and get at least three different supplier quotes to ensure you're budgeting accurately and getting a fair price.

Once you've had your budget approved, create a spreadsheet where you can keep track of your costs as you book in your vendors. Don't be discouraged if your proposed budget is knocked back or you wind up having a smaller amount of money to play with — with a little bit of creativity you can make any budget work!

Choose your venue

When choosing a venue, the best place to start is your school! You likely have some great facilities which would be perfect for an event, and the venue hire will be free of charge. If your school can't accommodate your event size or requirements, we recommend researching local venues, performing art centres, or convention centres.

Before you commit to a venue, make sure it's suitable for your event type, the number of attendees, the required equipment and infrastructure. You might also need to check whether you'll need a permit to host your event off-campus.

Source your vendors and speakers

Your school events are often used as a way to make a good impression on families — both current and prospective. Vendors and guest speakers can take your event to the next level and create an enjoyable experience for attendees. Because of this, it's best to book your vendors at least two to three months out from your event date to lock them in early.

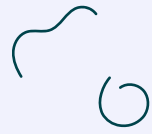
If you're looking to organise school merchandise to sell or give away at your event, make sure you place your order well in advance — three months should give you plenty of time to receive a sample of each product, make changes (if necessary) and then confirm your final order amounts.

Recruit your volunteers

Staff and volunteers are the backbone of a successful school event. To secure their help, make sure you put the call out for volunteers at least a month in advance. This provides enough time for them to make space in their calendars, while also ensuring that the event is close enough that they can properly commit.

If you plan on asking students to volunteer, implement some volunteer management strategies to ensure that they are aware of their role requirements and can ask any questions about the event well in advance.

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Start advertising your school event

To make sure that people actually show up to your event, you'll need to spread the word well in advance. Once your event is planned, speakers are confirmed and you have a firm venue and date, it's time to start advertising!

Pick your communication channels

The channels that you use to promote your event will depend on the amount of event budget that you have set aside for marketing. If you find you don't have a lot of money to spend on advertising, never fear! There are plenty of free and low-cost channels that you can use, including:

- A banner on the homepage of your school website that leads to a landing page where families can register their attendance.
- Email marketing to a segmented audience that is likely to be interested in attending your event.
- Social media posts, both organic and (if you have enough budget) paid social advertising that targets families in your local area.
- A public or private events page hosted on Facebook and LinkedIn.
- A calendar event using the calendar module on your school app.



Plan photo opportunities

You may have heard of the fear of missing out, otherwise known as FOMO. You can create FOMO at your events by encouraging attendees to showcase their experience on social media — from registration right through to snaps on the day.

Activations and photo opportunities are a fun way to incorporate your school's branding and encourage attendees to get excited about attending your event. A balloon arch, arbour or backdrop branded in your school colours is a photo opportunity that attendees will gravitate towards. If you've created an official hashtag for your school event, show it off! Print out some signage that you can place around your event that includes your school hashtag. This will help to encourage user-generated content and it will nudge attendees to include it in their posts.

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Create a contingency plan



You've organised your event and started gaining registrations, but how do you plan for a big change that will affect the success of your event? Or even the ability to host your event at all?

Event change can be caused by something as simple as wet weather or a guest speaker becoming ill and pulling out at the last minute. The important thing is that you are prepared to make fast and appropriate decisions about these changes using your contingency plan.

A contingency plan will outline all of the possible changes that can affect your event, and how these changes should be managed. For example, a wet weather section in your plan will list every supplier and vendor that you're using for your event and their cancellation policy should your event be rained out. This will ensure you're prepared for potential cancellation costs and that you know how much notice you need to give each company for a wet weather cancellation.

Shifting to a virtual event

With an abundance of free online event platforms, such as Zoom and YouTube Live, it's easy to make the switch from an in-person event to a virtual event if needed. Many school-related events can be run just as effectively online as they are in-person, such as open days, seminars, staff professional development, parent-teacher conferences and school tours.



When you remove the in-person element of an event, you may see a drop in engagement and attendance. However, with a little creativity and a lot of enthusiasm, you can create an engaging online experience for your attendees. No matter the platform you choose to host your event, make sure you have:

- An aesthetic background for speakers
- Concise but informative supporting slide decks with on-brand supporting graphics
- A range of different speakers
- Q&A segments or activity breaks throughout and at the end of your event
- High-quality camera, microphone, and recording equipment

If you're planning on involving guest speakers in your virtual event, it's a good idea to set up one or two practices on the streaming platform before the day. This will allow them to feel comfortable and prepared in front of the camera.

Postponing your event

We understand that in certain circumstances events have to be cancelled or postponed — there's just no getting around it. We know how difficult it can be to deliver disappointing news to excited attendees, but here are some best practice tips for delivering this news:

- 1 Choose a new date by running through your school calendar with your team and picking one that doesn't clash with any pre-existing events.
- 2 Carefully construct your communication messaging. This should include an apology and a simple explanation for the cancellation with the offer of a ticket refund or credit if appropriate.
- 3 Alert all registrants that you've cancelled or postponed with details about the updated event. Publish this information across your chosen communication channels as well as reaching out to your attendees individually.

Last-minute event considerations

As you get closer to the big day, it's easy to relax, but you need to remember that this is the **most crucial time** leading up to your event. A strategic event planner will use the final week to:

- Contact and confirm shift times and equipment with all suppliers
- Prep volunteers about their responsibilities on the day
- Check the weather report (particularly if it's an outdoor venue)
- Finalise the packing of any gift bags or marketing materials
- Update all parties with the final registration numbers
- Send your attendees a last-minute email outlining everything they need to know for the day
- Create event management documents to help the day run smoothly, such as a site map, run order, contact lists, contingency plan, risk management documents, and post-event evaluation forms

05

On the day: running your event

So, you've made it to your event day — congratulations! A lot of hard work and preparation has gone into making this day a success, but you can't switch off just yet. You'll need to make sure that you're running a tight ship from the time you wake up in the morning to the final pack down of the night. To do this effectively you'll need to have a few processes in place.

Organise your vendors

To start, make sure that your event planning documents are easily accessible whether that's printed out in a folder or on a laptop that you'll have with you for the day. Your event day will likely start with your vendors and stakeholders arriving on site. Check your vendors in, provide them with a site map of the venue, and take them to the area where they'll be setting up. Once your stakeholders are checked in, your attendees are next!

Register your attendees

The check-in process can be a challenging start to your event as you'll have multiple people arriving and attempting to check-in at the same time. To minimise disruption, create an area with one to two tables and two staff that are assisting the check-in. If your attendees have received check-in details before event day, it's going to make your life a whole lot easier! You'll want your onsite check-in to have direction and flow to avoid long queues.



Manage the event schedule

After your check-in process is complete and your event has commenced, it's your job to monitor vendors and assess whether any suppliers, speakers, staff, or attendees require assistance. If you do run into any problems on the day, try to address the situation as quickly as possible without drawing too much attention to the situation.

Supervise pack down

Once your event has concluded, you'll need to supervise the pack down process with vendors, staff, and volunteers. You'll need to ensure that the venue is clean, the equipment has been packed down appropriately, and all vendors have exited the venue and are taking home all of their own equipment.



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Measuring your event success^{1/2}

Once your event is done and dusted, it's time to check in on those event KPIs that you set right at the beginning of the process. If you've taken the time to set clear objectives and measures for your event, it should be easy to evaluate whether your event was successful (or not).

Once you've completed a full event evaluation, create a report that includes your findings and your learnings for future events that can be distributed throughout your team. This ensures that every event builds on the successes of previous events without repeating the failures! In time, and with some great planning, you'll start seeing a winning events strategy emerge that will set your school apart from the competition. Good luck!

Now that you're caught up on everything you need to know about running successful K-12 school events, you can begin improving your strategy and planning.

Wondering how you can streamline your events communication, registration and check-in processes? [Get in touch with Digistorm](#) to learn more about the Funnel — your all-in-one enrolment management solution that includes some handy events functionality!





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