

BUSINESS READINESS HANDBOOK

A Planning Guide for Major Events
with Practical Tips and Case Studies



The Business Case for Placemaking

Business understands that events draw consumers to the marketplace. Destination events, whether hosted locally or in an adjacent market, can be a powerful economic tool. The return on investment is real, it is measurable, and it extends well beyond the event itself.

The immediate business impact of a well-executed destination event is easy to see in hospitality, food service, and retail. Hotel rooms fill, restaurants run at capacity, and retailers move inventory. And the economic activity does not stop there.

For business-to-business activity, the impact is subtler but equally significant. Events bring decision-makers into a market who would not otherwise visit. Relationships form. Contracts follow. A business owner who meets a regional buyer at a sponsored dinner, or a developer who tours a commercial district during an event weekend, is making decisions informed by direct experience. That kind of exposure is difficult to manufacture and impossible to buy outright.

The longer-term case for destination events is about what they leave behind. A community that consistently attracts and hosts quality events builds a reputation that compounds over time. That reputation reaches workforce, investors, and businesses evaluating where to locate or expand.

Skilled workers and business owners alike evaluate markets the way they evaluate employers: they want to see energy, investment, and a track record of getting things done. Entrepreneurs factor community activity into their assessments to start and expand a business. Investors notice when a market draws people to it repeatedly.

Placemaking is not a cultural amenity. It is an economic strategy. When events generate pride of place, repeat visitors, media attention, and new business relationships, the community that hosted them carries those returns forward. The businesses that participated carry them forward too, in the form of new contacts, new customers, and a stronger market to operate in.

This handbook outlines practical strategies for destination event planning, no matter the size or location of the event. The Chamber understands that placemaking through events provides lasting business advantages for any community.



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Greater Federal Way Chamber CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Becca".



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CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING DESTINATION EVENTS

Key Takeaways

- Destination events draw visitors specifically for the event experience
- Event visitors spend 2-3 times more than typical tourists
- Different event types (sporting, cultural, business) require distinct strategies
- Events create concentrated periods of demand that require special preparations
- Successful event strategies balance authenticity with visitor expectations

Destination events represent opportunity for communities and businesses to showcase their unique character while generating significant economic activity. These events bring visitors specifically to your location, creating a concentrated period of increased demand across sectors from hospitality to retail and beyond. Understanding the fundamental nature of these events—their scale, demographics, and potential impacts—forms the essential foundation for effective business localization strategies.

Event Types and Their Unique Characteristics

Destination events exist across a wide spectrum, from massive international gatherings like the FIFA World Cup in Seattle and Olympic trials at the King County Aquatic Center to regional cultural celebrations that reflect local heritage. They include sporting competitions that attract passionate fans, conferences and conventions that bring industry professionals, and festivals that celebrate music, film, food, or cultural traditions. Each event type brings distinct visitor profiles with different expectations, spending patterns, and needs, requiring tailored approaches for business success.

Economic Impact Beyond Direct Spending

The economic impact of destination events extends far beyond direct visitor spending. While accommodations, dining, retail, and transportation see immediate benefits, these events generate indirect economic advantages through increased employment, enhanced community infrastructure, and elevation of the destination's brand profile. Research consistently shows that destination event visitors typically spend two to three times more per day than regular tourists, making them a particularly valuable market segment. These visitors are also more likely to extend their stays and explore beyond the event itself when properly engaged by local businesses.

PRACTICAL TIP

Form an event action committee with representatives from each stakeholder group for major events. Create a shared calendar accessible to all stakeholders that tracks not only the main event schedule but also related business promotions, special hours, and supporting activities.

Stakeholder Coordination for Maximum Impact

Successful event localization requires coordinated effort across numerous stakeholders. Local businesses form the front line of the visitor experience, while event organizers establish the primary draw. Chambers of commerce and tourism bureaus provide crucial coordination and marketing support. Local government and regulatory agencies create the operating environment, while residents and community organizations contribute to the authentic sense of place that distinguishes one destination from another. Creating formal communication structures between these stakeholders enhances coordination and maximizes collective benefits.

Capturing the Drive-Market Opportunity

Not every event visitor books a hotel room. A significant share of regional event audiences lives within a one to three hour drive of the host city, and these visitors are among the most underserved segments in event localization strategy. They move fast, make same day decisions, and stop where it's convenient. Businesses along major travel corridors can capture meaningful revenue from visitors who never planned to stop but did, through well timed social media, geotargeted digital ads, and signage that speaks directly to event travelers passing through.

Communities near a host city face a different question: how do you benefit from an event that isn't happening in your backyard? The answer is in the gaps. Host cities during major events are congested, expensive, and logistically complicated. A community within 30 to 60 minutes of the venue is generally quieter, more affordable, and filled with genuine local character which can position itself as the smarter base of operations. That positioning works best when businesses coordinate: shared messaging, a unified landing page, and lodging partnerships that collectively say "stay here, play there".

The businesses that benefit most from this positioning are those that do the work before the event arrives: updating their hours, training staff on event schedules and transit options, and creating offerings specifically designed for the event traveler's mindset. A restaurant that builds a pre-game prix fixe and posts it on social media two weeks before the first match is capturing intent. One that waits until game day is competing for leftovers.



PRACTICAL TIP

Map the drive corridors to your nearest major event venue and identify the natural stopping points where your businesses cluster. Then build a simple "on your way" campaign: social ads, updated Google Business profiles, and highway-visible signage. Time each to event travel patterns.

CASE STUDY Traverse City Film Festival

Success Through Stakeholder Collaboration

The Traverse City Film Festival demonstrates how effective stakeholder collaboration can transform a destination. What began as a modest film celebration has become a major economic driver for this Michigan community, generating over \$5 million in direct economic impact during its five-day run. This success stems from intentional year-round planning with business representation, coordinated business hours throughout the downtown district, themed products at local retailers, restaurant prix fixe "festival menus" to manage volume, and a volunteer program that includes local business employees. With 90% of downtown businesses reporting significant sales increases during the festival, Traverse City exemplifies how understanding the fundamental dynamics of destination events leads to community-wide benefits.



CHAPTER 2:

BUSINESS READINESS

Key Takeaways

- Create separate financial tracking for event-related expenses and revenue
- Develop staffing plans with appropriate incentives for high-demand periods
- Establish backup supplier relationships for critical inventory items
- Test all technology systems under simulated peak conditions
- Create designated crisis response teams with clear decision authority

Business readiness encompasses the operational foundations that support successful event participation, from financial planning to technology infrastructure. Implementing comprehensive readiness strategies ensures that businesses can capitalize on opportunities presented by destination events while managing the associated complexities and challenges.

Financial Planning for Event Economics

Financial planning for event seasons requires recognizing the distinct economic patterns these periods create. Developing separate financial tracking categories for event-related expenses and revenue enables accurate performance measurement and return-on-investment analysis. Cash flow projections specific to the event period should account for increased inventory and supply costs, temporary staffing and overtime expenses, and potential technology and equipment investments for enhanced efficiency. Many businesses establish distinct metrics to measure event performance, recognizing that these periods operate under different economic conditions than regular business cycles. This segregated approach to financial management provides clear visibility into the true impact of destination events on the business's overall performance.

Staffing for High-Volume Periods

Staffing and human resources management becomes particularly complex during high-volume event periods. Developing accurate labor forecasting based on expected visitor volume, creating flexible staffing plans with on-call options, and implementing cross-training to enhance team flexibility are essential components of effective staffing strategies. Many businesses create "event team" designations with special training and incentives for staff working during major events, recognizing the increased demands these periods place on employees. Incentive programs specific to event periods, clear communication systems for high-volume operations, and structured support mechanisms help maintain staff morale and performance under pressure.



PRACTICAL TIP

Create a separate financial tracking category for event-related expenses and revenue to accurately measure performance and ROI. This separation allows you to evaluate event investments independently from regular operations, leading to more strategic decision-making for future events.

Supply Chain Resilience

Supply chain preparedness ensures that businesses can meet increased demand without disruptions that affect the customer experience. Identifying potential supply chain bottlenecks before events, establishing relationships with backup suppliers, and implementing inventory pre-staging for high-demand items create resilience in the supply system. Many businesses create “supply chain stress tests” by simulating event conditions and identifying potential failure points before they occur in real operations. Developing just-in-time delivery systems where appropriate, establishing clear communication channels with key suppliers, and creating contingency plans for supply disruptions provide the flexibility needed to manage the uncertainties of event periods.

PRACTICAL TIP

Create “event team” designations with special training and incentives for staff working during major events. This approach recognizes the increased demands these periods place on employees while creating a sense of shared purpose that enhances team performance.

Technology for Peak Demand

Technology infrastructure must be designed to handle the increased demands of event periods. Point-of-sale systems must accommodate peak transaction volume, payment processing must have sufficient bandwidth and redundancy, and reservation and booking systems must function reliably under high load. Many businesses conduct technology “load tests” before major events, simulating peak usage to identify potential issues before they affect customers. Mobile solutions for operational flexibility, adequate Wi-Fi capacity for increased usage, and backup systems and processes for technology failures create resilience that supports continued operations even when facing technical challenges.

PRACTICAL TIP

Create a “supply chain stress test” by simulating event conditions and identifying potential failure points before they occur in real operations. This proactive approach reveals vulnerabilities that can be addressed before they impact actual operations.

Crisis Management for High-Risk Periods

Crisis management planning takes on heightened importance during events, when large visitor numbers and concentrated activity increase both the likelihood and potential impact of disruptions. Developing specific crisis protocols for event periods, creating clear communication channels for emergency situations, and training staff on procedures specific to high-volume situations prepare businesses to respond effectively to unexpected challenges. Many businesses create designated crisis response teams with clear roles and decision-making authority for rapid response during events. Establishing relationships with local emergency services, implementing backup systems for critical business functions, and creating customer communication templates for various scenarios ensure that businesses can maintain operations and protect both visitors and staff during emergencies.

CASE STUDY FIFA World Cup

Comprehensive Hospitality Readiness

The FIFA World Cup in Qatar demonstrated comprehensive business readiness across the hospitality sector. The West Bay Hotel District implemented coordinated “Fan Zone” shuttles connecting properties to match venues, created modular food service options ranging from grab-and-go to traditional dining, and developed team-specific welcome packages that could be quickly changed based on which teams were playing. Hotels implemented room turnover systems capable of handling 150% normal capacity, created digital concierge services in 12 languages via mobile apps, and established 24-hour support services for international visitor needs. This coordinated approach accommodated 1.4 million visitors over the month-long tournament, with participating businesses reporting average revenue increases of 320% compared to normal operations and visitor satisfaction ratings averaging 4.6/5 despite the logistical challenges of the event’s scale.



CHAPTER 3: RETAIL STRATEGIES

Key Takeaways

- Create graduated inventory deployment for different event phases
- Develop emergency resupply relationships with key vendors
- Implement separate tracking for event-specific merchandise
- Use “inventory scouts” to identify trending items in real time
- Design flexible spaces that can convert between selling and storage

The retail sector faces unique challenges and opportunities during destination events. Successful retailers recognize that events require a comprehensive transformation of operations, from inventory management to staff training and beyond. This chapter explores how retailers can adapt their business models to capitalize on event-driven visitor traffic while maintaining their authentic character and service quality.

Inventory Management for High-Volume Periods

Inventory management during high-volume event periods represents one of the most critical factors in retail success. The delicate balance between having sufficient stock to meet demand without carrying excessive inventory requires sophisticated planning. During SXSW in Austin, retailers like Allen’s Boots implement a graduated inventory deployment system with three distinct phases. They begin with high-margin specialty items for early attendees, transition to broader inventory with emphasis on mid-price souvenirs and practical items during peak days, and conclude with a clearance strategy for remaining event merchandise. This approach incorporates daily micro-deliveries instead of weekly shipments, separate tracking for festival-specific merchandise versus standard stock, and emergency resupply protocols with key vendors for 24-hour turnaround. The creation of “inventory scouts” who work the festival to identify trending items provides real-time intelligence that drives daily purchasing decisions.



PRACTICAL TIP

Create an “event inventory” category in your system to track performance of event-specific items separately from regular stock. This separation allows for more accurate forecasting for future events while preventing event anomalies from distorting your regular inventory analytics.

Visual Merchandising That Captures Attention

Visual merchandising takes on heightened importance during destination events, as visitors form quick impressions that influence their purchasing decisions. Effective visual presentation immediately communicates relevance to event visitors while remaining authentic to the store’s brand identity. Window displays that reference event themes, strategic positioning of event-related merchandise near entrances, and signage that explicitly welcomes attendees create immediate

connections. The physical layout of the store should accommodate increased foot traffic while creating intuitive pathways to showcase local specialties and event-related merchandise. Many successful retailers create a “visitor’s first impression” zone in the front third of their store with their most relevant event-related products, ensuring that the initial moments of the shopping experience establish relevance and authenticity.

Strategic Pricing for Event Periods

Pricing strategies during peak event periods require thoughtful consideration. Rather than implementing significant price increases that may create negative impressions, successful retailers focus on creating value-added bundles and premium “event special” versions of products with enhanced features or exclusive packaging that justify higher price points. Tiered pricing options for different customer segments, limited-time offers exclusive to event attendees, and loyalty programs that encourage multiple visits during the event can maximize revenue while building goodwill. Strategic “loss leaders” can drive foot traffic, with carefully selected items priced to attract visitors who then purchase higher-margin merchandise.

Practical Tip

Create a “visitor’s first impression” zone in the front third of your store with your most relevant event-related products and local specialties. This zone should be refreshed daily during the event to maintain a sense of discovery for repeat visitors.

Creating Event-Specific Product Lines

Event-specific product lines represent a significant opportunity for retailers to increase their appeal to event attendees. Limited-edition products themed around the event, co-branded merchandise developed in partnership with event organizers, and packaging of existing products in event-relevant combinations create unique offerings that visitors cannot find elsewhere. Many retailers develop “local showcase” sections featuring products made within their region, with information about their origin and significance to the area. This approach satisfies visitors’ desire for authentic souvenirs while supporting local producers and artisans.

Practical Tip

Rather than raising prices, create premium “event special” versions of products with enhanced features or exclusive packaging that justify higher price points. This approach preserves goodwill while capturing the increased willingness to spend that characterizes event visitors.

Staff as Experience Ambassadors

Staff training for visitor engagement represents the human element that can transform a transaction into a memorable experience. Beyond product knowledge, staff require event-specific information, local knowledge of attractions and amenities, cultural awareness for international visitors, and techniques for managing high-volume customer periods efficiently. Many retailers create laminated reference cards with key event information and local recommendations for staff to keep on hand during busy periods. Daily briefings before each shift ensure that staff have current information about event activities and visitor patterns, enabling them to provide timely recommendations and create authentic connections.

CASE STUDY South by Southwest

A Model of Multi-Business Collaboration

During South by Southwest (SXSW) in Austin, multiple businesses implement coordinated strategies to manage the influx of over 280,000 attendees. BookPeople creates a “Festival Survival Guide” display and schedules author events featuring festival participants, while Jo’s Coffee transforms its outdoor space into a “Festival Recharge Station” with extended seating and enhanced WiFi. Waterloo Records converts its parking lot into a performance venue for 45+ showcases and creates SXSW-exclusive vinyl releases with local artists. This collaborative approach creates a unified visitor experience, with participating businesses reporting 40-65% higher sales during SXSW compared to regular operations. The coordinated effort significantly increases visitor circulation between businesses, with cross-business referrals increasing by 200% during the event period.

CHAPTER 4:

HOSPITALITY EXCELLENCE



Key Takeaways

- Develop tiered pricing strategies that reflect demand patterns
- Create local event menus
- Design welcome packages that enhance guest experience

The hospitality sector forms the backbone of the visitor experience during destination events. Accommodation providers and food service businesses must balance increased volume with personalized service while managing operational complexities. This chapter explores strategies for hospitality businesses to thrive during high-demand periods while creating memorable experiences that encourage return visits and positive word-of-mouth.

Accommodation Planning and Capacity Management

Accommodation planning and capacity management requires sophisticated forecasting and operational flexibility. Successful hospitality providers develop accurate demand projections based on event registration data, create tiered pricing strategies based on demand patterns, and implement efficient check-in and check-out procedures for high volume periods. Many establish pre-arrival communication protocols with event-specific information that orients guests before they arrive. Creating “event welcome packages” for guests with schedules, maps, and exclusive local business offers enhances their experience while driving traffic to partner businesses. Contingency planning for unexpected capacity challenges—from weather disruptions to transportation issues—ensures that hospitality providers can maintain service quality even when facing unforeseen circumstances.

PRACTICAL TIP

Create “event welcome packages” for guests with schedules, maps, and exclusive local business offers to enhance their experience while driving traffic to partner businesses.

Food Service Adaptations

Food service adaptations during events require balancing efficiency with quality and authenticity. Restaurants and food service businesses often develop streamlined menus for peak volume periods, creating “festival menu” options featuring dishes that can be prepared efficiently while showcasing local specialties. Grab-and-go options for event attendees, pre-order systems for large groups, and strategic reservation management help maintain service quality during high-volume periods. Many restaurants implement specialized service systems that enhance table turnover while maintaining the guest experience, with carefully choreographed service patterns and pre-set timing for each service stage. Creating themed menu items that reference the event connects the dining experience to the broader destination experience, reinforcing the special nature of the occasion.

Creating Authentic Local Experiences

Creating authentic local experiences distinguishes memorable hospitality from merely functional service. Incorporating local ingredients, traditions, and stories into the guest experience creates a genuine sense of place that visitors value. Many hospitality providers create “local experience concierge” roles during events, with staff members dedicated to helping guests connect with authentic local opportunities beyond the primary event. Training staff to share authentic stories about the destination, creating physical spaces that reflect local character and heritage, and developing partnerships with local artists, craftspeople, and producers all contribute to an experience that feels authentic rather than generic. This approach transforms hospitality from a commodity into a distinctive experience that becomes part of the destination’s appeal.

Practical Tip

Create a separate “festival menu” featuring dishes that can be prepared efficiently while showcasing local specialties that visitors would want to experience. This approach balances operational efficiency with the authentic local flavor that visitors seek.

Service Systems for Peak Demand Periods

Managing increased service demand requires systems and strategies designed specifically for high-volume periods. Technology solutions for efficiency—from mobile check-in systems to digital ordering platforms—can maintain service quality under pressure. Creating clear service standards for peak periods, implementing strategic scheduling based on anticipated demand patterns, and ensuring sufficient back-of-house capacity to support front-line service are essential elements of successful event operations. Many hospitality providers develop a “rush hour toolkit” with systems, scripts, and strategies specifically designed for their highest-volume periods, enabling staff to maintain service quality even under extreme pressure.

Comprehensive Staff Training for Event Success

Hospitality staff training represents perhaps the most critical element of successful event operations. Well-prepared staff maintain service quality during high-pressure event periods while creating personalized experiences that distinguish the property. Comprehensive training programs include event-specific knowledge and logistics, local area expertise for guest recommendations, cultural sensitivity for international visitors, and techniques for managing service recovery during high-stress periods. Many hospitality providers create role-playing scenarios during training that simulate expected event conditions, allowing staff to practice service strategies in a supportive environment before facing actual event volumes.

Practical Tip

Develop a “rush hour toolkit” with systems, scripts, and strategies specifically designed for your highest-volume periods. This toolkit should include simplified service protocols, pre-prepared responses to common questions, and clear decision-making guidelines for situations that require immediate resolution.

Case Study Rose Festival

Hotel Monaco’s Comprehensive Approach

The Hotel Monaco in Portland demonstrates these principles during the annual Rose Festival. The hotel creates pre-arrival emails with festival schedules and information about exclusive viewing areas, implements “Rose Ready” packages with parade-viewing essentials, stations a dedicated “Festival Concierge” in the lobby during peak hours, and creates a “Festival Express Breakfast” for guests heading to early events. By partnering with local transportation providers for shuttle services and developing themed cocktails and menu items, the hotel creates an integrated festival experience. This comprehensive approach allows the Hotel Monaco to maintain 98% occupancy during the festival with a 35% premium on room rates while achieving guest satisfaction scores comparable to normal operations.

CHAPTER 5: LOCAL EVENT TIE-INS



Key Takeaways

- Create offerings that solve attendee pain points and practical needs
- Develop authentic experiences that showcase local character and culture
- Establish official relationships with event organizers for credibility
- Extend visitor engagement beyond the main event dates
- Form strategic partnerships with complementary businesses

Creating meaningful connections between local businesses and destination events transforms both the visitor experience and business outcomes. This chapter explores strategies for developing authentic ties between businesses and events, creating experiences that enhance the primary event while generating additional revenue opportunities.

Complementary Offerings to Enhance Events

Developing complementary offerings that enhance the event experience allows businesses to capture significant visitor spending. By analyzing the event schedule to identify complementary opportunities, businesses can create products or services that solve attendee pain points and extend or enhance the event experience. Many businesses survey past event attendees to identify unmet needs or frustrations, then develop specialized offerings to address these gaps. Considering the practical needs of event participants—from connectivity and device charging to transportation and comfort—often reveals straightforward service opportunities that generate goodwill and revenue. Creating packages that combine business offerings with event activities and partnering with event organizers for official tie-in opportunities establishes credibility and visibility with the event audience.

Authenticity as a Competitive Advantage

Creating authentic local connections addresses visitors' increasing desire for experiences beyond the main event. Highlighting a business's local heritage and connections, showcasing local products and ingredients, and creating storytelling opportunities about local culture and history establish authenticity that visitors value. Many businesses develop "Local's Guides" with authentic recommendations from staff members who live in the community, providing insider knowledge that enhances the visitor experience. Creating experiences that provide "behind the scenes" access to local culture and connecting visitors with local communities in meaningful ways transforms a transaction into a memorable experience that distinguishes the destination in visitors' minds.



PRACTICAL TIP

Survey past event attendees to identify unmet needs or frustrations that your business could address with specialized offerings. This targeted approach ensures that your event-specific products and services address actual visitor needs rather than assumed preferences.

Strategic Collaboration with Organizers

Collaborative programming with event organizers creates mutually beneficial opportunities that elevate both the business and the event. Proposing official satellite events at business locations, developing co-branded products or experiences, and creating exclusive offers for event participants establishes direct connections to the event program. Many businesses host event-related personalities or presenters, provide specialized services for event operations, or contribute to official event programming. Developing specific proposals for event organizers that clearly articulate the mutual benefits of collaboration increases the likelihood of successful partnerships that enhance both the business offering and the overall event experience.



PRACTICAL TIP

Create a "Local's Guide" to your community with authentic recommendations from staff members who live locally. This resource provides visitors with insider knowledge that enhances their experience while establishing your business as a genuine local authority.

Extending Visitor Engagement Beyond the Event

Pre- and post-event engagement strategies extend visitor engagement beyond the main event dates, significantly increasing economic impact for businesses and the destination. Creating "early arrival" specials and packages, developing post-event activities and experiences, and implementing "return visit" promotions for event attendees expands the economic opportunity beyond the core event period. Digital engagement before physical arrival, content marketing focused on extending stays, and loyalty programs specific to event visitors create ongoing relationships that extend beyond the event itself. Many destinations develop "Before & After" guides highlighting experiences available in the days surrounding the main event, encouraging visitors to extend their stays and experience the destination beyond the primary attraction.



PRACTICAL TIP

Develop a "Before & After" guide highlighting experiences available in the days surrounding the main event. This resource encourages visitors to extend their stays and experience your destination beyond the primary attraction, generating additional economic impact while reducing congestion during peak event periods.

Strategic Business Partnerships for Experiences

Event partnership opportunities between complementary businesses create comprehensive visitor experiences while sharing marketing costs and operational resources. Package deals with complementary businesses, cross-promotional marketing campaigns, and established referral systems between local businesses create a unified destination experience. Many communities form "event business alliances" with complementary businesses to create comprehensive visitor packages and shared marketing initiatives. Multi-business loyalty programs for visitors, shared staffing or resource arrangements during peak periods, and "experience trails" connecting multiple businesses create integrated experiences that encourage visitors to explore beyond a single location or business.

CASE STUDY Craft Beer Week

Asheville's Coordinated Culinary Approach

Asheville's independent restaurant alliance demonstrated successful local integration during the city's annual Craft Beer Week. The alliance developed a "Brewery & Bite" passport program with special pairings at 24 restaurants, created chef/brewer collaborative dining events, and implemented staff training on local beer knowledge across all member restaurants. Participating establishments developed beer-infused menu items highlighting local breweries, created a mobile app with restaurant specials and beer pairing recommendations, and organized transportation between dining and brewery locations. This coordinated approach resulted in participating restaurants reporting a 35% increase in food sales during the event, with 60% of visitors extending their stay specifically to complete the "Brewery & Bite" passport program.

CHAPTER 6: MARKETING FOR DESTINATION EVENTS

Key Takeaways

- Begin pre-event marketing 6-12 months in advance with strategic escalation
- Create coordinated digital ecosystems across business districts
- Maintain traditional marketing presence in physical spaces
- Form collaborative marketing partnerships to extend reach
- Implement systematic post-event engagement to drive return visits

Effective marketing for destination events requires specialized strategies that reach visitors during planning phases, enhance their experience during the event, and maintain engagement after their departure. This chapter explores comprehensive marketing approaches that maximize business visibility and appeal throughout the visitor journey.

Timeline-Based Marketing

Pre-event marketing must begin well before the event itself to capture visitors during their planning phase. A strategic timeline typically begins 6-12 months before the event by ensuring business information accuracy on all platforms, followed by search engine optimization for event-related terms 3-6 months before the event. Launching specific landing pages 2-3 months before, implementing targeted digital advertising 1-2 months before, activating social media campaigns 2-4 weeks before, and launching email marketing 1-2 weeks before creates a gradually intensifying marketing presence that aligns with typical visitor planning patterns. During event week, real-time marketing reflecting current conditions completes the pre-event marketing sequence. Creating a comprehensive marketing calendar that coordinates all channels and messaging ensures maximum impact through consistent, reinforcing messages across platforms.

PRACTICAL TIP

Create a comprehensive marketing calendar that coordinates all channels and messaging for maximum impact. This timeline should align marketing intensity with typical visitor planning patterns, gradually increasing visibility as the event approaches.

Integrated Digital Strategy

Digital strategy for event visitors leverages the predominantly online planning process most visitors employ. Event-specific landing pages optimized for search terms related to the event, geotargeted advertising activated during the event period, and content marketing highlighting business relevance to the event create digital visibility throughout the planning and attendance phases.

Traditional Marketing in Physical Spaces

Traditional marketing approaches remain effective for event audiences despite the increasing importance of digital channels. Advertising in official event programs and materials, creating physical presence in high-traffic event areas, and developing print collateral for distribution at

visitor centers establish visibility in the physical environment visitors navigate. Many businesses design print materials specifically for in-destination use with clear maps, contact information, and compelling offers that drive immediate action. Out-of-home advertising on transportation routes, in-room marketing at local accommodations, and branded merchandise that functions as mobile advertising extend reach beyond digital channels to create environmental marketing that surrounds visitors throughout their experience.



PRACTICAL TIP

Use Google Analytics to create specific audience segments based on event-related search terms, then target these segments with customized content. This targeted approach reaches potential visitors during their planning phase with messaging specifically relevant to their interests and intentions.

Collaborative Marketing for Extended Reach

Collaborative marketing opportunities extend reach and reduce costs for individual businesses. Partnerships with complementary businesses on shared campaigns, co-op advertising with other local businesses, and participation in destination marketing organization initiatives create economies of scale that individual businesses cannot achieve independently. Many communities form marketing cooperatives with similar businesses to create shared content, advertising, and resources with greater impact than individual efforts. Cross-promotional arrangements with event organizers, referral programs with other businesses, and package deals that can be collectively marketed create integrated marketing ecosystems that benefit all participants.

Strategic Post-Event Engagement

Post-event marketing retention strategies convert event visitors into returning customers through systematic engagement after their departure. Collecting contact information during the event, implementing immediate post-event thank you communications, and creating “return visitor” special offers maintain the relationship established during the event. Content marketing highlighting year-round experiences, segmented email marketing based on visitor interests, and social media engagement with event participants keep the destination present in visitors’ minds after they return home. Many destinations create specific email nurture sequences for event visitors that provide valuable destination content while making the case for return visits, recognizing that a first visit during an event often serves as an introduction that can lead to deeper exploration on subsequent trips.



PRACTICAL TIP

Design print materials specifically for in-destination use with clear maps, contact information, and compelling offers that drive immediate action. These materials should anticipate the information needs of visitors in various contexts, from orientation to specific service or product discovery.

CASE STUDY Savannah Music Festival

Integrated Marketing Excellence

Visit Savannah demonstrated these principles during the annual Savannah Music Festival with their comprehensive marketing campaign. The destination marketing organization developed a “Beyond the Music” digital campaign highlighting experiences complementary to the festival, created a collaborative marketing fund for small businesses to participate in festival promotions, and implemented a visitor app with real-time event updates and business recommendations. Their unified social media strategy across 50+ participating businesses, targeted content for different visitor segments, and visitor email capture program with sequential post-event communications created a comprehensive marketing ecosystem. The campaign generated a 22% increase in festival attendance, with average stay increasing from 3.2 to 4.7 nights and 38% of first-time visitors making return trips within 18 months.



CHAPTER 7: WELCOMING INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

Key Takeaways

- Implement tiered cultural training appropriate to different staff roles
- Create multilingual materials for essential visitor information
- Accommodate global payment preferences and transaction methods
- Recognize cultural variations in service expectations and communication
- Understand regulatory requirements for international commerce

Destination events increasingly attract international visitors, requiring businesses to develop specialized capabilities for serving guests from diverse cultural backgrounds. This chapter explores comprehensive strategies for creating welcoming environments for international visitors while addressing their unique needs and expectations.

Cultural Sensitivity Training

Cultural sensitivity training prepares staff to engage respectfully with international visitors, enhancing the experience while preventing misunderstandings. For the Olympic Trials in Eugene, businesses implemented a tiered cultural training program with differentiated content for different staff roles. All staff received basic training covering appropriate greetings and gestures across cultures, core cultural values of major visitor countries, recognition of dietary restrictions and accommodations, and essential phrases in key languages.

Customer-facing staff received additional training on cultural expectations around service styles, non-verbal communication differences, cultural considerations in problem resolution, and sports-specific cultural traditions and celebrations. Management teams received advanced training on cultural dimensions of conflict resolution, managing multicultural teams during high-stress periods, identifying and addressing cultural microaggressions, and creating culturally inclusive service environments. This comprehensive approach was delivered through a combination of in-person workshops, digital learning modules, and daily pre-shift “cultural moments” focusing on specific visitor groups arriving that day.



PRACTICAL TIP

Create quick reference guides for staff that outline key cultural considerations for your major international visitor markets. These guides should include appropriate greetings, service expectations, communication styles, and potential misunderstandings to avoid.

Breaking Language Barriers

Language accessibility planning reduces communication barriers that can significantly impact the visitor experience. Identifying key visitor information that should be available in multiple languages, creating language-specific welcome materials, and implementing visual communication tools that transcend language barriers create accessible environments for international guests. Many businesses develop sets of universal visual symbols for common requests and services to facilitate communication when language barriers exist. Translation services for critical interactions,

digital tools for language support, and strategic utilization of multilingual staff further enhance communication capabilities. Creating language-specific sections on business websites acknowledges international visitors during their planning phase, establishing welcoming impressions before arrival.



PRACTICAL TIP

Develop a set of universal visual symbols for common requests and services to facilitate communication when language barriers exist. These visual tools can significantly reduce frustration during interactions while demonstrating consideration for international guests.

Global Payment Solutions

International payment solutions remove transaction barriers for visitors, accommodating diverse payment preferences and systems. Accepting major international credit cards, implementing contactless payment options, and considering dynamic currency conversion options simplify financial transactions for international guests. Many businesses display approximate prices in major currencies of international visitors to help them understand value without calculations. Training staff on international transaction procedures, creating clear policies for currency exchange, and implementing mobile payment options popular in key markets—from China’s Alipay and WeChat Pay to various European digital wallets—demonstrate consideration for international visitors’ needs and preferences.

Cultural Variations in Customer Expectations

Understanding global customer expectations acknowledges that visitor expectations vary significantly across cultures. Service style preferences—from the formal, reserved approach expected in some cultures to the casual, friendly style preferred in others—influence how visitors perceive service quality. Pace of service expectations, privacy and personal space considerations, and communication style preferences similarly vary across cultures. Many businesses create customer journey maps specific to different cultural backgrounds, identifying potential points of friction based on varying expectations. Recognizing the different approaches to negotiation in retail settings, gift-giving customs and expectations, and group versus individual decision-making patterns allows businesses to adapt their approach to align with visitor expectations.

Navigating International Regulations

Compliance with international regulations ensures smooth operations when serving international visitors. Creating clear processes for handling tax-free shopping for international visitors, understanding visa and passport verification requirements, and recognizing export regulations for purchased goods prevent complications that can negatively impact the visitor experience. Many businesses develop reference guides covering customs declaration requirements, international shipping regulations, health and safety compliance for international standards, and privacy laws across different jurisdictions. This regulatory knowledge prevents unintentional barriers to service while demonstrating professionalism and global awareness.

CASE STUDY

Portland Japanese Garden

Cultural Authenticity for International Visitors

The Portland Japanese Garden demonstrates these principles during its peak cherry blossom season, when it welcomes thousands of Japanese visitors. The garden implemented Japanese-language guided tours with culturally appropriate protocols, developed specialized training for staff on Japanese cultural expectations, and created payment systems supporting Japanese credit cards and mobile payments. Their authentic Japanese tea ceremony experiences with certified practitioners, partnerships with Japanese tour operators for integrated experiences, and bilingual signage and materials throughout the facility create a culturally resonant environment. The dedicated welcome areas for Japanese tour groups complete a comprehensive approach to international visitor service. This strategic focus increased Japanese visitation by 45% over three years, with visitor satisfaction ratings increasing from 87% to 96%, establishing the garden as an exemplary destination in Japanese tourism publications.

RESOURCES

World Cup Ready Playbooks

The Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce serves as the official small business liaison for the Seattle FIFA World Cup 26™ Local Organizing Committee. The following free playbooks are available at seattlechamber.com/world-cup.

Small Business Megaevent Playbook

The flagship readiness resource for Washington small businesses. Covers business preparedness frameworks, real-world case studies, and actionable strategies to capture World Cup economic opportunity — and sustain momentum after the tournament ends. bit.ly/49Bl88y



Watch Party Playbook

Step-by-step guidance for hosting a World Cup watch party or event — from small in-business screenings to large public activations. Covers size, location, and scope options, along with licensing, FIFA brand compliance, and logistics for Washington venues. bit.ly/46DpGG

Community Brand Playbook

The unified visual and messaging identity toolkit for Seattle-area businesses and organizations. Explains how to promote your business alongside the FIFA World Cup in a consistent, FIFA-compliant way. Brand assets are available by download request. bit.ly/4nLJAcg

Mega Events Readiness Playbook — Graphic Novel Edition

A visually engaging graphic-novel format of the Small Business Readiness Playbook. Walks businesses through practical checklists and action items in an accessible, easy-to-share format — well suited for staff training and team distribution. bit.ly/4qNa1Q1



How Employers Can Prevent Human Trafficking

With 750,000+ international visitors expected in the Puget Sound region, BEST (Businesses Ending Slavery and Trafficking) equips employers with prevention training applicable across all industries — covering risk identification, staff training, and reporting protocols. seattlechamber.com/world-cup

Let's Play SEA 26 Hospitality Playbook

The Seattle Hospitality Playbook is a practical guide designed to help local businesses confidently welcome global visitors during the 2026 FIFA World Cup™. It offers cultural insights and service guidance, to support great guest experiences and leave a lasting impression of Seattle. visitseattle.org/sea26/community/

Kickin' It Federal Way

The City of Federal Way, The Federal Way Arts Foundation, and the Federal Way Performing Arts and Events Center are teaming up for a three-day festival including a watch party of FIFA World Cup 26™ games, live music, food vendors, and more!



Community Partners play an important role in bringing this celebration to life. By participating as a Community Partner, your business or organization can engage directly with attendees, build visibility within the community, and show your support for local events and shared experiences. kickitfw.com/

NOTES

GREATER FEDERAL WAY
Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce Building
31919 1st Ave S, Ste 202
Federal Way, WA 98003

2026

Pivotal Partners

woodbridge
CORPORATE PARK

Virginia Mason
Franciscan Health



Lakehaven
WATER & SEWER DISTRICT

FEDERAL WAY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
East School • Middle School • Brantley School

CITY OF
Federal Way

Sustaining Investors

PAEC
PERFORMING ARTS
EVENT CENTER

GREENE

Cornerstone Investors

HIGHLINE
COLLEGE

red canoe
CREDIT UNION

SOUNDTRANSIT

Champion Investors

EQUALUS LLC
HORSEPOWER IN BUSINESS AND LIFE

East India Grill
253.529.9292

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