

Magnet Events: A Dance Showcase Will Attract Potential Dancers.

One of the primary topics of conversation among dancers is how to get more people to start dancing. Once people start dancing - assuming they stay with it long enough for dancing to become fun - they are likely to continue dancing for years. The challenge comes in encouraging people to begin.

One way to expose new people to dancing is to stage a “magnet event” focused on dance. A magnet event is designed to draw the attention of celebrities, the media and (ultimately) the general public. The goal of a dance-focused magnet event like a dance showcase is to attract the attention of the general public, to expose them to the idea of partner dancing and to convince them to begin dancing.

When organizing a dance showcase there are many details to consider, and foremost among them is location. A large ballroom would be nice, but will there be enough seating? A theatre or high-school auditorium would have seating available, and would even have performance-quality lighting, but might not have the perfect ambiance. Size, atmosphere and equipment resources are just some of the factors to consider when choosing a venue. Once the location is selected, the date(s) of the showcase can be determined. The date could be determined first, especially if the dance showcase coincides with a specific date or other event, but setting a date early may limit the choices of available locations.

The organizers also must determine whether to provide food and drinks. Selling concessions often raises additional legal and logistical concerns and may not be worth the trouble. It would be better to have a well-run event without food than a poorly run event that includes great drinks and hors d’oeuvres. If possible, arrange for open dancing during an intermission or after the showcase, to help attract the interest of those who are experienced dancers. To protect everyone involved, remember to arrange for event insurance in case someone is injured!

An effective magnet dance showcase should be as inclusive as possible to be attractive to the potential dancer. Both competitive and social dances should be featured to show all aspects of partner dancing. However, since social dances tend to be more accessible to potential dancers perhaps the focus should be more toward social dancing. Regardless of any style focus, dancers with a wide range of skills should be included to ensure that everyone will be able to see someone like themselves dancing.

Scheduling a mixture of dances that feature either one couple, or groups of couples, would increase visual variety and interest. To widen the attraction of the event, and to encourage cooperation among dance professionals, as many different schools, teachers, and competitive partnerships as possible should be included in the showcase.

An effective magnet event is one that achieves its goal - in this case, attracting potential dancers to the scene. However, dance associations or instructors will not want to overextend themselves financially to organize such an event. Since publicity is crucial to an event's success, but may be costly, consider innovative ways to promote the event. The most cost-effective way to publicize a magnet event is to include aspects that will attract the attention of the print and broadcast media and then allow them to do most of the promotion. Television and print media prefer to cover positive events that include color, movement, children and cute, fuzzy animals. A dance showcase would automatically include color and movement while including Youth and College Network (YCN) clubs, or other youth groups, would cover the "children" aspect. It might be challenging to include animals in a dance showcase in an elegant manner, but perhaps if the showcase was a fundraising event for an animal-centric cause it could be done effectively.

Making the dance showcase a fundraising event for a charity will help to ensure its success. Since the idea is to attract potential dancers, not those already involved in dancing, the charity shouldn't be associated with dancing. National organizations like the Make-A-Wish Foundation, or the American Cancer Society are always looking for extra funding, and would make excellent beneficiaries. Locating a local charity that needs an extra boost is also an excellent choice. The charity would get extra income, and the joy of partner dancing would get positive publicity, a winning combination for everyone involved.

If possible, invite representatives of the charity to attend and give a brief presentation. Photograph the presentation, and the awarding of the funds raised, if you do it at that time. Might the Governor or Mayor be available? It's part of their job as elected officials to be involved in the community, and they will be happy to be involved with a positive event. Are there local celebrities who might be invited to attend? It is a well-known fact that newspapers spend more time covering events that include celebrities. Is there a local radio or television personality who might agree to be the Master of Ceremonies? If so, they will undoubtedly talk about the showcase on the air.

To reach the largest number of potential dancers, the dance showcase needs to be well promoted. A certain amount of this promotion will need to be paid advertising, but organizers should not ignore the potential that comes with Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and calendar of events listings. Radio stations are required by law to supply a certain amount of airtime to community events, although PSAs are usually restricted to non-profit organizations such as the United States Amateur Ballroom Dancers Association (USABDA). However, making the dance showcase a fundraiser would allow access to this publicity even if a USABDA chapter is not the host of the event.

Most of the organizational details should be worked out four to six months in advance of the dance showcase so that there is plenty of time for pre-event fundraising. Renting a location, paying for advertising, insurance and the printing of brochures and programs can be expensive. Arranging for event sponsors can be one way to offset these costs.

Consider whether for your purposes a single, large sponsor would be the best choice, or whether several small sponsors might be better. Start the pre-event promotional campaign by approaching media outlets, banks and dance-related businesses since this could lead to lower advertising or printing rates.

Once the date, location and dancers involved are determined, news releases should be sent out to monthly papers to ensure coverage in their calendar of events. These releases should go out at least a month in advance of the showcase, and should include photographs of the dancers, if possible. If the news releases are well written they are sometimes published as submitted. Several weeks before the showcase all local newspapers and television stations should be contacted to get the name of the events calendar editor, and the releases should be sent. A week before the showcase the calendar editor or staff member who received the news release should be contacted again to offer additional information. Ask if photographers, reporters, or camera crews might be attending, and invite them, if necessary. After the event, follow up with an additional news release, including photos, highlighting the event's overwhelming success, and, if applicable, how much money was raised.

Another aspect of post-event publicity might be to produce a live-to-tape cable access program (see Dancing USA, March/April 2004), and have the program broadcast on local cable access stations. It might also be possible to make duplicates of the tapes and offer them for sale as an additional source of income for the fundraiser.

Using a magnet event like a dance showcase to attract potential dancers to the joy of partner dancing can be done effectively with proper planning and cooperation. The three-pronged approach of pre-event, event, and post event promotion will ensure the greatest possible contact with potential dancers. Pre-event activities like contacting dancers and potential sponsors will begin the promotional campaign, while the bulk of the campaign will focus on creating and scheduling news releases, public service announcements and paid advertising about the event. These activities will be capped by post-event news releases and perhaps cable access broadcast of the showcase. Even if one or two of the promotional aspects of this event fall short of expectations, the overall effect on partner dancing will be very positive. Then, when you do it again the next year, you will be even more successful!