



Mastering Event Planning

25

EXPERT
TIPS

Virtual Assistants
For: **Executive Assistants**
Marketing Assistants

by Sara Beth Reynolds

mmc
events

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Introduction

In the last fifteen years, our family business, MMC Events, has worked on thousands of events and collaborated with hundreds of speakers. As a family business of event professionals and multi-award-winning speakers, we are uniquely positioned to understand both sides of the industry.

In 2009, Peter Roper, a multi-award-winning professional speaker, consultant, author, and trainer, partnered with his daughter Sara Beth Reynolds, an award-winning event and project manager, and something extraordinary happened. A unique dedicated family business that understands all sides of the business. Since then, MMC has made it their business to ensure every client reaches the potential our team knows they are capable of.

So why is it that some events are more successful than others?

Knowledge, expertise and application!

With so many things to consider, it is easy to overlook the small but essential details that can make all the difference in an event. As a professional, your ability to market yourself effectively and demonstrate your value is crucial to your career. Therefore, let's look at some areas essential to your success and increase your knowledge. Then, having applied the knowledge, your expertise will grow. Simple!

So read on, and we wish you the very best of luck...

Sara Beth

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Introduction

Event planning may seem daunting, especially for those new to the field or juggling multiple responsibilities. But with a solid foundation and a bit of guidance, we know you can confidently manage engaging, efficient, and impactful events.

This guide is designed specifically for marketing assistants, virtual assistants (VAs), and executive assistants (EAs) who are tasked with event planning or assisting.

Whether you're planning a team-building session, a product launch, or a conference, these tips will introduce you to the key concepts of event planning and provide practical advice to make your next event a success.

If you're ready to explore the world of event planning further, ask about our free webinars and dedicated courses. These offer in-depth strategies and solutions that could help you master the skills needed to execute flawless events.

For more information, contact sara@mmcevents.co.uk.

Why this event?

1. Understand the Event's Purpose and Why You are Holding It/Working On It

Every successful event starts with a clear understanding of its purpose. Without a defined goal, it's easy to get lost in the details and lose sight of what the event is trying to achieve.

For example, if it's a business event, is it designed to promote a product, educate an audience, or create networking opportunities? If it's a private event, such as a wedding or party, the purpose and "why" will shape every decision you make - location, content, speakers, and even the types of attendees you invite.

2. Set Clear Objectives

Once you've understood the purpose, it's time to set clear, measurable objectives for your event.

Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals will help guide your decisions throughout the planning process. Whether you want to increase attendance, generate sales, or boost brand awareness, setting concrete objectives will help you stay focused.

For example, if you're planning a corporate event, your goal might be to increase client engagement by 20% through networking sessions or post-event follow-ups.

3. Know Your Audience

Understanding your audience is key to creating a relevant and impactful event.

Who will be attending your event? What are their needs, preferences, and pain points? By understanding your audience, you can tailor the event to suit them, from the venue and speakers to the content and overall experience.

Conduct surveys, review past event feedback, and speak with key stakeholders to gather insights into your attendees' expectations. The more you know about them, the more effectively you can engage them.

Ensure you are considering the delegate's needs, from accessibility to neurodiversity and more.

4. Create a Budget Early On

Budgeting is one of the most critical aspects of event planning. It's easy for costs to spiral out of control, so creating and sticking to a budget from the start is essential.

Start by categorising your expenses (venue, catering, technology, marketing, etc.). Then, allocate a percentage of your overall budget to each category, leaving room for unexpected costs.

Once your budget is set, monitor and track spending carefully to avoid surprises. Use tools like spreadsheets or event management software to track everything and stay on top of expenses.

Vendors - the basics

5. Book Your Venue Early

Securing a venue early ensures that you get the best location at the best price, and it's a crucial step in the event planning process.

Start researching venues early, considering factors like capacity, accessibility, amenities, and proximity to transport hubs or accommodations.

If possible, visit the venues in person to assess whether they meet your needs. Consider the overall vibe you want to convey and ensure the space aligns with the event's objectives.

Also, ensure that the venue offers the necessary technical support and equipment.

6. Don't Forget AV and Tech

Audio-visual and technical setups are essential for most events, and technical issues can quickly turn an event from successful to chaotic.

Whether it's microphones, projectors, or Wi-Fi, ensure all technical aspects are tested well before the event. If your event requires complex tech setups like video streaming or live broadcasting, make sure to have a tech team in place to troubleshoot potential issues.

Always have a backup plan, such as spare batteries or extra cables, in case something goes wrong.

7. Coordinate with Vendors in Advance

Vendors play a crucial role in the success of an event, from catering to tech setups. Communication with them is key to ensuring everything runs smoothly.

Establish clear communication with all vendors well in advance of the event. Confirm delivery times, specifications for equipment (e.g., sound systems, lighting), and catering menus.

Hold a pre-event meeting or send a detailed checklist to confirm expectations and last-minute details. Creating a vendor timeline and ensuring all deadlines are met helps avoid stress on the event day.

Also, having a backup vendor plan for critical elements like catering or AV equipment can save you from disaster in case of last-minute issues.

Planning is Essential

8. Build a Timeline

Planning an event involves coordinating many moving parts. A well-crafted timeline will help you stay organised and ensure everything runs smoothly.

Create a detailed timeline for every phase of the event—before, during, and after. Outline tasks, deadlines, and milestones and allocate sufficient time for each task.

This includes booking vendors, marketing campaigns, content creation, and staff assignments. Include buffers for delays and ensure key team members know their responsibilities.

9. Stay Organised with Checklists

Organisation is the backbone of successful event planning. Checklists are your best tool for staying on top of everything.

There are countless tasks to manage, from booking the venue to sending invites and confirming catering. Organise these tasks in a checklist format and ensure everything is checked off before moving on to the next.

Project management tools, such as Trello, Asana, or simple spreadsheet checklists, can help you track progress and stay organised.

10. Use Event Management Software

Event management software can simplify many aspects of the planning process and help you stay efficient. Tools like Eventbrite, Asana, or Monday.com can help you track RSVPs, budgets, timelines, and tasks. These platforms also allow for team collaboration so everyone stays aligned and up to date.

Event management software can also generate reports and analytics, helping you track the success of your event and make data-driven decisions for future planning.

11. Consider Catering Needs Early

Catering is often one of the most complex logistics to manage. Address dietary restrictions and preferences early in the planning process.

Get clear on your guest count, the types of meals (buffet vs. plated), and any dietary needs such as vegetarian, gluten-free, or allergy restrictions.

Partner with reputable caterers who can provide diverse options that accommodate your attendees' needs. Catering often must be booked months in advance, so don't leave this task to the last minute.

Promotion

12. Promote Your Event on Social Media

Social media is a powerful tool for generating buzz and engaging your audience long before the event begins.

Create a content calendar to promote your event across various social platforms. Share behind-the-scenes content, speaker announcements, sneak peeks, and event countdowns.

Engage with your audience by responding to questions and comments. Paid social ads are also a great way to expand your reach and attract attendees who might not have heard about your event otherwise.

13. Create Engaging Invitations

A well-designed invitation captures attention and sets the tone for your event.

Ensure your invitation is clear, visually appealing, and includes all necessary information: date, time, location, and RSVP instructions.

Personalise invitations to connect more meaningfully with your audience. Depending on the formality of your event, consider using email campaigns or even sending physical invitations.

14. Don't Skimp on Event Materials

Event materials, such as programs, agendas, and informational handouts, are essential for making a professional impression and keeping attendees engaged.

Well-designed event materials serve as your guidebook for the day, helping attendees follow along and stay informed. This can include printed programs, speaker bios, session outlines, or branded materials such as brochures and pamphlets.

Consider offering digital versions for eco-conscious attendees or to save on printing costs. Providing your attendees with something tangible enhances the experience and ensures they have all the necessary information at their fingertips.

15. Use Email Marketing

Email marketing is essential for pre-event promotion, communication with attendees, and post-event engagement.

Use email marketing before the event to generate excitement and keep your attendees informed. Send out reminders about the event, introduce key speakers, and share exclusive content or sneak peeks.

After the event, follow up with thank-you emails, post-event surveys, and links to any resources (e.g., recordings, slides). Email marketing is also a great way to provide value through curated content, such as blog posts or additional reading, which can continue the conversation after the event ends.

Act As If You Are The Delegate!

16. Think About Event Flow

Event flow refers to the seamless transition between various sessions, activities, and breaks. A well-thought-out flow keeps attendees engaged and ensures the event feels well-paced and organised.

Create a detailed schedule that accounts for transitions between different sessions or activities. For example, after a keynote speech, plan for a brief networking session or a coffee break before the next speaker. Having some buffer time between sessions can also help avoid delays.

Anticipate potential bottlenecks, such as large numbers of people needing to move from one area to another, and plan accordingly. Good event flow ensures that attendees remain engaged and are not frustrated by long waits or confusion.

17. Plan for Networking

Networking is one of the most valuable aspects of attending an event. Whether it's a corporate meeting, a conference, or a social event, people often attend to make new connections.

Build networking into the schedule to facilitate interaction. You can organise structured networking sessions or even casual "coffee break" times for people to mingle. To encourage interaction, consider providing name tags that display the name and company affiliation.

Offering icebreakers or questions to stimulate conversation can also help shy guests. Ensuring your attendees have ample opportunities to meet one another will increase the value of the event for everyone involved.

18. Engage Your Attendees

Engaged attendees are more likely to have a positive experience and provide valuable feedback. Therefore, it is crucial to keep your audience involved throughout the event.

Use interactive features like live polls, Q&A sessions, or audience feedback tools to keep people engaged during the event. If it's a virtual event, incorporate chat rooms or breakout sessions.

For in-person events, consider having activities like games or challenges. Remember, it's not all about the content—create moments for attendees to contribute, ask questions, or share their thoughts. This engages them and increases the chances of making a memorable experience they'll talk about long after the event ends.

19. Make Check-In Easy

The check-in process is the first interaction your attendees will have with your event, so making it smooth and efficient is important.

Set up a digital registration system to streamline the process. For in-person events, consider using tablets or kiosks where attendees can check in quickly without having to stand in long lines. Ensure that name badges, programs, or any materials are ready for pickup.

The easier the check-in, the more positive the attendees' first impression will be. If your event is hybrid or virtual, ensure clear instructions and a test run for any digital check-ins or login systems.

The Final Stages

20. Prepare for Last-Minute Changes

No matter how well you plan, unexpected changes are bound to occur. Being prepared for them can make a massive difference in the success of your event.

Last-minute changes might include a speaker cancelling, malfunctioning technology, or even a change in guest numbers. The key is flexibility. Have backup plans in place—whether it's a list of alternative speakers or

a tech support team on standby.

Ensure that key team members are ready to adapt quickly and seamlessly communicate any changes to attendees. By staying calm and prepared for the unexpected, you'll be able to manage these challenges effectively without stressing out your team or your guests.

21. Set Up Early

Setting up the event space in advance is critical to avoiding stress and ensuring a smooth start.

Arrive at the venue early to set up all equipment, decorations, and seating arrangements. Test all AV equipment before guests arrive and ensure all signs, banners, and materials are in place.

A full dry run can prevent unexpected issues. Ensure all team members know their responsibilities and have enough time to settle in. The earlier you start, the more likely it is that everything will be ready when the first guest arrives.

22. Keep Track of RSVP Responses

Tracking RSVPs is essential for understanding your guest list and ensuring you have enough resources for everyone.

Create a system to track RSVP responses and monitor special requests such as dietary needs or accessibility requirements. This could be a simple spreadsheet or, ideally, an event management tool like Eventbrite, which allows you to track guests and follow up if necessary.

Be proactive in managing changes to attendance. If someone cancels at the last minute, confirm the update so you can adjust seating arrangements or catering orders.

After the event

23. Plan for Post-Event Communication

Don't let the conversation end when the event does. Post-event communication is just as important as the event itself.

After the event, contact attendees to thank them for their participation. Share highlights, event photos, or recordings of sessions.

Send out a survey to gather valuable feedback, which will help you improve future events. Additionally, clearly communicate any next steps or calls to action, such as signing up for future events or accessing more content.

24. Ask for Feedback

Feedback is one of the most valuable tools in improving your event planning process.

Create an easy-to-fill survey that asks specific questions about attendee satisfaction. Did the event meet their expectations? Was the content valuable? Was the venue suitable? Use the feedback to identify areas of improvement, such as logistics, content delivery, or even the catering service.

Don't just gather feedback—use it to refine your future event strategies. Be open to constructive criticism and adjust based on attendee input.

The Golden Rule

25. Stay Calm and Confident

Event planning can be stressful, but your ability to remain calm under pressure is essential to handling any situation effectively.

When unexpected challenges arise, it's essential to remain composed. Your calm demeanour will reassure your team and attendees.

Trust in your planning, but also be ready to adjust quickly when things don't go as expected.

Practice stress management techniques, like deep breathing or short breaks, to maintain your focus. By staying confident and solution-oriented, you can lead your team through any challenges and ensure the event's success.

Why Implementing these Twenty Five Event Planning Tips Can Significantly Elevate Your Career as a Virtual Assistant (VA), Executive Assistant (EA), or Marketing Assistant

1

Enhanced Organisational Skills: Mastering event planning requires meticulous organisation, which translates to improved efficiency in all administrative tasks. By managing complex event logistics, you develop a systematic approach to handling multiple projects simultaneously, ensuring deadlines are met and priorities are effectively managed.

2

Improved Time Management: Coordinating events hones your ability to prioritise and manage multiple tasks, leading to better productivity. The need to balance various event components teaches you to allocate time wisely, set realistic goals, and avoid procrastination, resulting in more efficient workflows.

3

Strengthened Communication Abilities: Engaging with vendors, clients, and team members during event planning enhances both verbal and written communication skills. Clear and effective communication is crucial for conveying ideas, negotiating contracts, and ensuring all stakeholders are aligned, thereby fostering stronger professional relationships.

4

Expanded Professional Network: Organising events introduces you to new contacts, broadening your professional network and opening doors to future opportunities. Building relationships with vendors, clients, and industry professionals can lead to collaborations, referrals, and access to new markets, enhancing your career prospects.

5

Increased Problem-Solving Aptitude: Addressing unforeseen challenges during events sharpens your ability to think critically and find practical solutions. The dynamic nature of event planning requires quick thinking and adaptability, skills that are transferable to various aspects of your professional role.

6

Demonstrated Leadership Qualities: Taking charge of event planning showcases your leadership skills, making you a more valuable asset to your organisation. Leading a team, making decisions under pressure, and ensuring successful event execution highlight your capability to manage projects and inspire others.

7

Broadened Industry Knowledge: Planning diverse events exposes you to various industries and trends, enriching your overall professional knowledge. This exposure allows you to understand different market dynamics, customer preferences, and emerging trends, making you a more versatile and informed professional.

8

Enhanced Attention to Detail: The precision required in event planning translates to a keener eye for detail in all aspects of your work. Ensuring every element of an event aligns with the overall vision cultivates a meticulous approach to tasks, reducing errors and improving quality.

9

Elevated Client Satisfaction: Successfully executed events lead to higher client satisfaction, reflecting positively on your professional reputation. Delivering memorable experiences not only strengthens client relationships but also enhances your credibility and trustworthiness in the industry.

10

Career Advancement Opportunities: Proven event planning expertise can position you for promotions or new roles that require these competencies. Demonstrating your ability to manage complex projects and deliver results can make you a strong candidate for higher-level positions and increased responsibilities.

By integrating these tips into your skill set, you improve your event planning capabilities and enhance your overall professional profile, paving the way for career growth and new opportunities.

Why Avoiding These Ten Mistakes is Critical to Your Career

Don't Ignore the Event's Purpose

Failing to clearly define the purpose of your event can lead to confusion and a lack of direction. If you don't know what you're trying to achieve, neither will your attendees, speakers, or team.

1

Every decision you make, from the venue to the content, should align with the event's goals. Whether it's brand awareness, networking, or education, understanding the event's purpose ensures everything is relevant and serves the overall objective. Without this focus, your event can feel disorganised, attendees may not find it valuable, and the overall impact will be diluted.

Don't Wait Until the Last Minute to Book Vendors

Waiting until the last minute can limit your options, raise costs, and lead to less-than-ideal vendor choices.

2

Booking vendors early ensures you have enough time to evaluate your options, negotiate prices, and confirm availability. If you wait too long, you risk running out of qualified vendors or paying premium rates for last-minute bookings. Secure catering, AV services, and other key vendors as soon as possible to avoid stress and increase the quality of your event.

Don't Overlook the Importance of Communication

Poor communication can lead to confusion, mistakes, and delays, especially among the planning team and with vendors.

3

Effective communication is crucial at every stage of event planning. Clear communication keeps everything on track, whether it's ensuring that all team members know their roles, keeping vendors in the loop about requirements, or providing attendees with event updates. Lack of communication results in missed details, scheduling conflicts, and disorganisation—problems that could easily be avoided with regular updates and check-ins.

Don't Ignore Your Budget

Going over budget can lead to financial strain, compromise the quality of your event, and leave you scrambling for last-minute fixes.

4

Setting and sticking to a budget is critical for a successful event. Allocating funds appropriately for each area (venue, catering, tech, etc.) is essential. Spending should be monitored regularly and adjusted as necessary to stay within limits. If you don't adhere to your budget, you might need to cut corners or overspend in other areas, which can affect the overall event experience.

Don't Skip a Thorough Run-Through Before the Event

Skipping a rehearsal or dry run can lead to unexpected problems that proper preparation could have avoided.

5

Before the event, conduct a full dry run, especially for technical elements, catering, and schedules. Testing everything—AV equipment, registration systems, and seating arrangements—will help identify potential issues early. Without a thorough run-through, you may encounter last-minute technical glitches, scheduling delays, or mistakes that affect the flow of the event.

Don't Overcomplicate the Event Agenda

An overly complex agenda can overwhelm attendees and make it hard for them to stay engaged throughout the event.

6

Keep the schedule simple and well-paced, with time allocated for breaks and networking. An event packed with too many sessions or activities will make it difficult for attendees to follow and may lead to disengagement. Strive for balance by allowing time for interaction and ensuring each session serves a clear purpose. Overloading the agenda can also lead to burnout, leaving attendees feeling exhausted rather than inspired.

Don't Underestimate the Power of Networking

Neglecting networking opportunities could result in missed connections and less value for your attendees.

7

One primary reason people attend events is to network. If you fail to create dedicated time or space for networking, you are missing an opportunity to add value. Consider a structured networking session or simply ensuring plenty of breaks where attendees can mingle and connect. Networking isn't just a nice-to-have; it's one of the key elements that makes an event memorable.

Don't Forget to Think About Accessibility

Ignoring accessibility needs can alienate potential attendees and leave a poor impression of your event.

8

Make sure your event is accessible to all attendees, including those with physical, sensory, or other needs. This includes things like wheelchair access, dietary restrictions, and providing materials in accessible formats (e.g., captions for videos and accessible restrooms). By considering these factors in advance, you ensure a welcoming environment for everyone, leading to better reviews and higher attendance in the future.

Don't Assume All Attendees Will Have the Same Expectations

Not all attendees are alike. Assuming they will all have the same interests or expectations can lead to disengagement.

9

It's essential to understand the diversity of your attendees and consider their different needs, preferences, and expectations. Whether it's the content, the pace, or how the event is delivered, tailoring the experience for different audience segments can increase engagement.

Offering choices like breakout sessions or personalised experiences can help attendees feel more included and valued.

Don't Forget to Plan for Post-Event Follow-Up

Neglecting post-event communication means losing valuable opportunities to build relationships and improve future events.

10

After the event, it's crucial to follow up with attendees, speakers, and vendors. Send thank-you emails, provide access to event materials (like presentations or recordings), and request feedback through surveys.

This follow-up process strengthens relationships, provides valuable insights for improving future events, and ensures your attendees feel appreciated.

Without it, you risk leaving the event on a note of uncertainty or forgetfulness, diminishing its long-term impact.

Summary of What Not to Do

Event planning can be incredibly rewarding, but it requires careful attention to detail. Avoiding these common mistakes will help ensure your event is well-executed, engaging, and impactful.

By keeping a clear focus on your event's purpose, maintaining open communication, sticking to your budget, and ensuring an inclusive and accessible experience, you'll be well on your way to creating a successful event that everyone will remember.

About MMC Events

At MMC Events, our knowledge and expertise in the events industry are unparalleled. Our business is perfectly positioned to help you plan with precision and execute with excellence.

In 2009, Peter Roper, a multi-award-winning professional speaker, consultant, author, and trainer, partnered with his daughter Sara Beth Reynolds, an award-winning event and project manager, and something extraordinary happened. Since then, MMC has made it their business to ensure every client and event reaches the potential our team knows they are capable of.

We are perfectly positioned to help you plan with precision and execute with excellence. Whether you need to impress 5, 50 or 500 people, our team will deliver what you need.

Let's talk today and ensure your next moment in the spotlight is one people talk about for all the right reasons.

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