

a guide...

to Ribbon Cuttings and Open Houses

- One of the most exciting events for a business, whether new or existing, is celebrating a grand opening, anniversary, recent achievement or business milestone.

These events are a significant part of your overall marketing and advertising plan and a great way to increase awareness about your company, products or services. The Chamber has put together this guide in order to assist you in the planning and preparation of these important events.



■ Getting started: setting a date

You should allow yourself plenty of time to organize the details of the event. Planning should begin at a minimum of three to four weeks ahead of the actual event date. This will also allow attendees enough time to respond and mark their calendars. Before choosing a date, here are some important things to consider:



- Be aware of major holidays and avoid planning your event for those days. Also, if you are trying to attract bankers or government officials, take note of any special holidays when their offices may be closed.
- Consult the Chamber's online Events Calendar at www.springfieldregionalchamber.com assure you are not selecting a date that conflicts with a Springfield Regional Chamber event.
- Try to avoid holding a weekend event. Most people have their own personal or recreation plans on Saturday and Sunday.
- Try to avoid a conflict with major community and/or sports events. Log onto the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitor's Bureau website, www.valleyvisitor.com, or the Springfield Business Improvement District website, www.springfielddowntown.com to find out what events are taking place locally.
- The best days of the week to get good attendance are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Mondays tend to be too busy for most people to leave the office and many people take Fridays off to start their weekend early.

■ choosing the best time of day

The time of day you choose to hold your event is also critical to its success. It's an important step in the planning process and help determine the type of special event that you'll conduct. Morning functions, for example, will have an entirely different atmosphere and style than an evening cocktail reception. Luncheon gatherings will naturally require more food and beverages. Consider the following when making your decision:



- Very few successful special events are held early in the morning (7 to 7:30am). Unless it is a necessity, morning events should begin no earlier than 8:00am.
- Luncheon events often turn out well, since most everyone eats a mid-day meal. However, luncheons require more advance notice in sending out invitations. Many people schedule luncheon arrangements weeks ahead and they will need to be notified as early as possible to get your event on their calendars. If you decided on a luncheon event, the best time is 11:45am to 1:00pm.
- Late afternoon and early evening functions seem to be the most popular and successful. This allows people to drop by after work at their convenience and doesn't interfere with the regular workday. The best time for an evening event is 4:30pm to 6:30pm, allowing everyone time to "drop in". Unless your event is a major one, a few people will want to go home, change clothes and go out again, so avoid late evening functions (7 to 8:00 pm).
- Try to avoid mid-morning and mid-afternoon time periods. Many people are reluctant or unable to break away from their work in the middle of the day.
- Half-day open houses or tours of your company are not advisable unless it's necessary or traditional in your line of business (i.e. hotels or restaurants). If you decide on a half-day event, be certain to have a designated time for a ribbon-cutting or other special ceremonies to lend focus to your event.
- If media coverage is important to you, give serious consideration to their deadlines before selecting a time for your event.

■ who's who- developing an invitation list

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| ■ Potential/current customers | ■ Employees and their families |
| ■ Suppliers | ■ Representatives from the Chamber |

- **Key government officials** - City Council members, mayors and public officials from the district where your business is located. If your goal is to have a public official present, you may want to schedule that person first and build your event around his/her availability.

■ Media outlets

■ Neighboring businesses

■ Friends and family

■ Business associates

■ invitations



Once you have identified your guest list, here are some tips to remember when sending out invitations:

- Prepare a basic invitation that is simple and to the point. Make sure all of the basic information is included- who, what, when, where, and why.
- If desired, include an RSVP. This will give you an idea as to how many people can attend and how much food/ beverages to have on hand.
- Allow a sufficient amount of time for guests to return their reply. A week to 10 days is sufficient for most events, although two weeks would be preferable if you are planning a luncheon or dinner event.
- Be sure to include a good map or very clear instructions on how to get to your event. A street address alone is not sufficient.
- Identify parking areas for your guests.
- Indicate in your invitation whether the event is casual, semi-formal/business attire or formal.
- If a spouse or other guest is invited, indicate that as well.

■ serving food and beverages

Hors d'oeuvres and beverages are typically served, but it is your decision. When planning for food, it is important to make time-appropriate selections. Here are some helpful ideas when it comes to planning a menu:

- For morning events, coffee, juices, fruit and pastries are common. A full breakfast is not necessary.
- At luncheon functions, serve some kind of sandwich or buffet meal. Keep in mind that guests attending a noon event are spending their lunch hour with you.
- During the late afternoon or early evening events, light hors d'oeuvres or finger food are appropriate. Chips, dips, cheeses, vegetable plates or cold-cut meat trays are perfect.
- If you choose to have a formal dinner or late evening party, make it exceptionally nice. If you are asking people to spend most of their evening at your event, they deserve something special.
- Serving alcohol: the only times alcoholic beverages are advisable are for late afternoon or evenings. Many people enjoy an afterwork cocktail. Beer and wine are sometimes served at luncheon gatherings, but alcohol is seldom served at morning events. Remember to provide some non-alcoholic beverages for guests who don't drink. (Check with your insurance agent about host liability).
- Many people choose to enlist the help of a caterer for medium to large events. This is especially helpful if you don't have the time, manpower or experience to provide your own food and beverages. Check with the Chamber or visit the online Membership Directory at www.springfieldregionalchamber.com for a list of our catering members.
- If you do decide to provide your own refreshments, be sure to have an ample amount of food and beverages for your guests, as well as sufficient plates, cups, napkins, trash cans and other supply items.

■ lights, camera, action! -planning a program



Whether you're staging a groundbreaking or a ribbon cutting for your company, it adds a nice touch to an event to have a brief program of some kind. It provides not only valuable recognition for you and your key people, but it makes the event more purposeful, and allows you to explain more about your business.

Consider these suggestions when planning your program or formal ceremony:

- People generally anticipate spending no more than about a half hour at a ribbon cutting or grand opening ceremony, so plan your event agenda accordingly.
- Limit the number of speakers and the length of their speeches. To help keep the program flowing smoothly, set a time limit for everyone asked to participate in the program. Be sure to give each of your speakers a call the day before the event as a reminder.

- Indoors or out, any group of 50 or less usually does not need a microphone system. More than 50 people usually requires voice amplification. A podium or lectern is often helpful to speakers.
- Conclude your program with the appropriate ceremonial or symbolic activity to commemorate the event: a ribbon cutting for a grand opening or shoveling the first load of dirt for a groundbreaking. These activities let guests know the formal program is over and they also create good photo opportunities.
- If your event includes an open house or tour of your facilities, be sure friendly and knowledgeable employees conduct group tours. Unguided self-tours by your guests are not nearly as valuable as guided tours.
- Consider having some kind of door prize or drawing as part of your program. Winning a sample of your product, a free trip for two or dinner at a nice restaurant can add to your guests' enjoyment... and perhaps build attendance.
- If holding an outdoor event, always have a back-up plan in case of inclement weather.
- Send thank-you letters the day after your event to anyone who played a key role in staging it, particularly those who took part in the official program. If you collected names and addresses of guests who attended, consider sending out a thank -you note to them as well.

■ getting media coverage



You should not rely on the media to give extensive coverage to your special event. It's not that they do not view your function as significant- it's simply a matter of lack of staffing and sufficient air time or print space to carry your story. The media is often swamped with news leads and are unable to provide good coverage to everything.

The following are some concrete things you can do to increase the chances of getting more media coverage for your event.

- Send a press release to the news directors or city editors at least ten days ahead of your event. More time may need to be allowed for print media. The Valley Press Club offers a Media Guide for \$37. To purchase a copy, call (413) 335- 8551.
- Your press release should include the journalistic basics of who, what, when, where and why. For more information on constructing an appropriate press release, please contact Nancy Creed at (413) 755-1309.
- A follow-up or reminder call the day before your event may also be a good idea.
- Have a camera and photographer on hand so that if the media was not able to attend your event, you can send a follow-up press release (with photo) stating that your event took place.

■ pre-planning: resources available from the chamber



■ CHAMBER CHANNELS

The Chamber's bi-monthly print newsletter (e-mail electronic version in alternating months) includes a section on Celebrating Our Members. To include details of your event, e-mail a press release to sullivan@springfieldregionalchamber.com. Submission deadlines are the **10th of the month preceding publication**.

■ MEDIA GUIDE

The media guide includes contact information for all regional media outlets, including newspapers, magazines, television stations and AM/FM radio stations. *

■ ELECTED OFFICIALS DIRECTORY

If you would like to invite local and state elected officials to your event, the Chamber has a listing available for these local leaders. Please contact Grace Szydziak at (413) 755-1310 to obtain the list.

■ MEMBERSHIP LIST

If you would like to invite fellow Chamber member businesses, you can purchase a membership list from the Chamber. It lists all Chamber members, the main contact at that company, address and phone number. Due to proprietary reasons, e-mail addresses are not available. Membership mailing lists and disks are available in Excel format, and by affiliate. To order a membership disk or a set of mailing labels, please contact Jim Majka at (413) 266-9145

*The Media Guide is available to purchase by calling the Valley Press Club at (413) 335- 8551.

■ at the event

■ CHAMBER ATTENDANCE

The Chamber will make every attempt to ensure that Chamber representation is present at your event. Please notify the Chamber at least two weeks prior to your event so that Chamber staff and volunteers can make plans to be in attendance. You can reach the Chamber by calling (413) 787-1555. If you would like a Chamber representative to speak at your event, please provide more advanced notification.

■ PHOTOGRAPHY

If arrangements have been made to have a Chamber representative present at your event, they will also have a camera. Digital photos will be taken and can be e-mailed to you for your purposes. Please remember to provide an e-mail address to the Chamber representative.

If you have additional questions or would like more information on Chamber resources, please contact:

**connect²
commerce**
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