

Checklists for organizing your own seminar (#7 of 15)

Here is a checklist, in rough chronological order, of the key steps to organizing and programming your own seminar:

(1) Write a one-sentence topic for a seminar.

(2) Concerning that topic, write answers to the following:

Who cares?

What problems will it solve?

How and where else can the same information be found?

How much time or money would the participant save by attending your seminar?

Why else would people attend it?

Do other seminars about your topic exist?

What do they cost?

What's their approach?

How long do they take?

How often are they given?

Where/how are they booked? Subsidized?

(3) Write a seminar description that includes objectives, benefits, who should attend, and why.

(4) Write a dozen titles. Select the best.

(5) Evaluate the resources for your seminar preparation. While checking the resources, compile a bibliography for your workbook. Later, in using the resources, select the best and annotate them.

(6) Prepare your budget: itemize expected costs and anticipate when the money will be needed; list the possible unexpected costs by source and date; list anticipated income and when expected; plot your income and costs on a calendar; evaluate

your need for a reserve fund, the amount and when needed; list your financial reserves: amount and when available; list the ways to increase income and reduce costs; determine the method(s) of participant payment: pre-registration only, discount for pre-registration, higher fee at the door, cash, or credit cards, etc.

(7) Determine the minimum payment you will accept for offering the seminar, factor in the cost for its presentation, then establish its cost to the participant.

(8) Plan your speaking schedule: dates, hours, cities, sites; check feasibility of travel as scheduled; contact sites, book facilities, make hotel/motel reservations.

(9) Plan your promotional campaign: list target audience, from the most to least likely to attend; list ways to best appeal to each potential audience; establish an operational budget for the most effective promotional approaches; prepare the time/method list for promotional activities; implement your campaign.

(10) Determine who will be your local contact at sites; establish responsibilities, method of reporting results; devise a method for recording and posting names of registrants to your mailing list; provide all needed promotional materials to your contact; determine who will handle/help with door registration and product sale, etc.

(11) Determine the kind/amount of non-promotional printed material needed: workbooks, evaluation sheets, door registration forms, receipts, product sale forms; set up a production schedule: writing, typing or typesetting, paste-up, printing.

(12) Prepare your seminar; plan, integrate audio-visual aids into the presentation; arrange for and schedule any outside speakers; evaluate the need for your own microphone, amplification, projectors, etc.; practice your presentation,

opening and closing remarks; break the seminar into segments, including breaks.

(13) Plan and purchase speaking attire that visually reinforces the seminar's objective.

(14) As the day approaches for final cancellation of facility fee for full/partial refund, decide if the seminar will be given.

(15) Review all promotional activities as the presentation day approaches.

(16) If scheduled, give radio/TV and newspaper interviews.

(17) Check the presentation site, the day before if possible; review the activities and provisions needed for the site personnel.

(18) Arrive at least an hour before the seminar, set up equipment, review the activities and responsibilities of the helpers, dress.

(19) Smile, take a deep breath, and give a super seminar!

(20) Read the evaluation sheets to see how the next seminar can be given better.

SOME ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR SEMINARING BUSINESS

(1) Select a business name.

(2) Complete the fictitious business statement process.

(3) Get necessary city/state licenses; if selling a product, get resale number from state taxing board.

(4) Open a business bank account.

(5) Check into credit card use at a bank for registration/sale of products.

- (6) Stock business stationery and needed supplies.
- (7) Investigate joining business or professional associations.
- (8) Familiarize yourself with single proprietorship and receipting responsibilities.
- (9) Keep records and receipts for all income and expenses.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS WHEN SCHEDULING THROUGH ACADEMIC EXTENSION

- (1) Contact colleges/universities at least four months—six is better—prior to the start of the quarter or semester to present your seminar(s) and yourself for possible inclusion in the next program, sending the title and description plus an outline of each seminar, a list of likely participants (by kind, vocation, description), and a resume—with a cover letter.
- (2) Offer to assist with promotion: news release preparation, radio/TV spots, etc.
- (3) Coordinate your workbook preparation with the extension office.
- (4) Prepare the necessary paperwork for later payment.
- (5) Maintain contact with each school prior to traveling there to offer the seminar(s).
- (6) Familiarize yourself with door registration procedures and evaluation forms.
- (7) Return all funds and forms to the sponsoring school promptly after offering your seminar(s).

Use all three categories as appropriate and needed. Because it is impossible to know all of the elements necessary for all seminars, or the exact order of elements needed for any seminar, the three components should be used as a guideline, with items moved, deleted, or added as exigency dictates.

From Gordon Burgett's **How to Set Up and Market Your Own Seminar** (audio CD version, 2009, with digital workbook and audio text summary). Produced by Communication Unlimited / 185 Shevelin Rd. / Novato, CA 94947 / (800) 563-1454 . For further information, see www.gordonburgett.com/order3.htm.

Offering seminars through college extended education programs (#5)

For more than 30 years I offered 2000+ seminars, workshops, and conferences in California, with more than half given at the California State University system (now CSU, formerly CSUC). Since I spoke at all but four of the 23 campuses then, let me focus on that structure to explain how one can get booked by the college extended education system.

(Most of the other programs I offered were at community (junior) colleges; a few were through the UC system.)

For those unfamiliar with the CSU system, it is the largest educational system in the world. It is comprised of institutions at the following locations: Arcata (Humboldt), Bakersfield, Carson (Dominguez Hills), Chico, Fresno, Fullerton, Hayward (East Bay), Long Beach, Los Angeles, Martinez (CA Maritime Academy), Monterey Bay, Northridge, Pomona, Rohnert Park (Sonoma), Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, San Luis Obispo, San Marcos, and Ventura (Channel Islands).

A quick, sad insert here. There have been key changes in the

California extended ed offerings in the past five or so years, with single programs (mine were usually four hours long) usually replaced by certification programs. So booking with these colleges today will likely be less satisfactory. However, in other major system nationwide, the process and bookability hasn't changed much, so what I'm sharing here is the way getting booked is still widely done elsewhere. The CSU system was the most comprehensive and reliable system I used (when I also spoke in five other states) so the way to apply and perform where you live and work (except in California) shouldn't be much different than what I am sharing.

While there were policies that tied all 23 schools together, most operated independently, particularly where seminars were concerned. The office you contacted was usually called the Office of Extended Education (or Programs), sometimes the Office of Continuing Education. A call to the school or a look at the current college catalog (check the listing in front under Administration) will give you the proper name—and the name of its director.

Some extended education offices had relatively free control over the type of programs they offered. Others were tightly controlled by the academic faculty at the institution. The latter is the case everywhere when the seminars you suggest were identical to or significantly overlapped academic classes given (or logically included in an academic program) at the institution. Thus you had the best chance at all CSUs if your program was different from what that institution offered or was some phase of practical application of theoretical academic programs. If you had an idea for a seminar and you were unsure, however, a call and discussion with the extended education director or staff would quickly tell you if your idea would be considered or would be acceptable.

The traditional approach was either to call or write a letter to the director suggesting a possible seminar or seminars, with a brief explanation of your qualifications, the seminar's

title, a brief description of its contents, and the length of time it lasted. The director would tell you if it was being offered in a similar form now or planned to be added in the near future, as well as whether it fit into their particular extended education format. The director might also have indicated whether he/she wanted to include it in the next bulletin or catalog.

At a later point more information would be required. (Some preferred to approach the director with a full project at the outset that included all that would be required.) This would include a concise letter of introduction presenting yourself and your seminar idea(s). Regarding yourself, it should tell who you are, why you should offer the seminar, past experiences enhancing your qualifications and a copy of your resume or dossier. For each seminar idea there should be a title, brief description, possible scheduling dates and times, a suggested cost to the participant, and the kind of audio-visual equipment needed or used. A seminar outline was highly desirable. A suggestion of who would want to attend the seminar and why, with perhaps an estimate of approximate attendance, would help sell the program to the director.

If you had given the seminar elsewhere, by all means indicate the dates, locations, and the person (and college) through whom it was scheduled (so the director could check the reference). Favorable comments made by the participants at earlier presentations should also be shared.

Pay varied widely throughout the CSUs but generally it fell in the 40-60% category. That means that you received that percentage of the income generated by pre-registrations and at-the-door payments. For that percentage you paid all of your costs, including transportation and room/board. Preparation of handout material was usually arranged with the director. Sometimes they picked up the tab if the handout isn't excessively long or complex. When academic credit was awarded for participation, your payment was almost always based on the

number of units given rather than on attendance. With BRN and other credentialing credit, it varied. The director handled all publicity, inclusion in the bulletin or extension catalog, room and audio-visual arrangements, support paperwork, pre-registration and other services. If your idea wouldn't draw a minimum attendance, in the director's opinion, he/she usually rejected your idea at the outset.

If there was the likelihood that your offering would attract sufficient participation the director would likely offer the seminar on the condition that if it failed to attract sufficient registration, it would be cancelled. Thus the minimum number needed to keep the seminar "alive" should have been decided with the director beforehand.

I found that by working with directors to provide additional publicity for your program, you could help attract more participants. This was done by preparing press releases and lists of groups or people who should be sent the bulletin or a flyer, plus offering to give interviews on radio or TV about your seminar. All of the promotion had to be clearly synchronized with the director so your activities and theirs were complementary.

Timing was also very important. To be included in the extension bulletin you had to contact the institution at least four (better, six) months before the start of the quarter or semester during which the program would be offered.

While cross-scheduling with other CSU schools in the same area at the same time made no sense, you could book your seminar at the University of California schools, community colleges, church groups, recreation programs, and other civic organizations and clubs. CSUs usually paid the best, unless you offered a self-sponsored seminar nearby. (They were far riskier so I never overlapped that way.)

The take-away here is to contact the colleges where you want

to speak and follow the process explained above. Be prepared from the outset to “sell” your program(s) to the extended ed leaders and staff. The whole procedure is rather confusing the first time or two, but after that it’s a triple win: for you, the participants, and the extended ed program.

Thus is blog #5 of 15 blogs, one appearing every 7-10 days, about “[How to Set Up and Market Your Own Seminar.](#)” (We also have an audio cassette/workbook program available about the full topic.)

Best wishes,

Gordon Burgett

More thoughts about selling your book(s) back of the room...

I began this topic and posted it on Tuesday, May 29 (2012). That includes 12 starter points you might want to read first, before I continue here.

13. When I give my speaking program, do I have the products with me? Ask my sore back! Yep. I usually put two (or three) boxes of products on a reinforced roller and bring them with me, arriving at least an hour ahead of the program. I can usually guess well enough (extras of each) that I don’t have to go to the car to get more items after the presentation. But if I do, I ask the folks still there if they’ll guard my books and I’ll be right back. That’s fine with them—and I’ve only had maybe five books stolen in about 30 years, and those off

the table during the first break (when the attendee also disappears!)

14. How do I pick BOR products to sell? The most important criterion is that they are written (or at least published) by me! Of those, I sell them at the same price they cost at the bookstore, though many become part of my special bundle. In fact, some of the books and reports are written and published specifically to match what I say at the seminars. For example, for decades I spoke about "How to Sell 75% of Your Freelance Writing." It dawned on me rather quickly that I could write reports or books about segments of that program where the listener/buyer would receive much more detail and far more examples. So I wrote a book about query letters, the pivotal part of selling better than 75%. And I wrote a long report about selling the second or reprint rights to the original article—which I'm about to summarize as a blog on June 5. Those became the kind of BOR items that participants eagerly bought while the topics were hot!

15. Do I ever sell others' products? Sure, particularly *Writer's Digest* items (like the *Writer's Market* of that year). But they must be particularly valuable to my attendees. I buy them from the publisher by the box, one or several with 15-40 in them, and get a 40-43% discount. Add shipping (very expensive now) to that and I earn about 33% profit.

16. Can you return the other publishers' books, if necessary? I suppose but it's a real pain. I take care to keep them clean and undamaged, and if they get dented or scratched I sell them at a 33% discount, so it's a wash and I at least get my shipping back.

17. How much profit can one realize from BOR sales? At the college/university level, where my attendance (in today's economy) averages about 25, I usually earned from BOR \$400-700 a program, and I once made, if I recall correctly, \$2800. But my larger-venue professional speaker buddies are often in five

digits. At one lunch at an NSA convention a very well known rally speaker mentioned that he had been paid \$2,000 to speak in Burbank. Not to worry, he added, the BOR take was \$33,000!

18. Any other advice about specific product choices? Some. Customize your products to match your presentations. And don't put two products on the table about the same topic: it so confuses the buyers they don't buy either. For example, when I spoke about self-publishing, I displayed Dan Poynter's *Self-Publishing Manual*. There was another book that covered the very same material, and the titles sounded similar too. I stayed with Dan's book. That saved me a lot of trying to explain why one book is better or different than the other, questions that are usually asked when I should be taking others' BOR orders.

19. Do I use (or hire) others to make my BOR sales? Almost never at the seminars, where I'm a one-man band. (I only sell products at the end of the seminar so I am available to speak with attendees during the two breaks.) If I'm speaking at a larger program in a different venue, I sometimes ask a couple of people in my audience if they'd like to handle the attendance and the SOPs sales in exchange for a couple of my products, their choice. That usually works well.

20. How do I handle credit card purchases? It used to be very hard to get into a credit card program—it was best to cajole your local bank to get you in. But now you can use PayPal and others. So that's what I do. I have the buyers write down the card numbers, expiry, their name, and the three magic numbers on the order form, plus what they are buying, and I process them by computer later that night. One necessity: ask to see the card and check the numbers before you give them the products. I get stiffed once or twice a year, for about \$30 each. I'm wary of accepting checks, but I will if there's no other choice. Cash is gladly accepted.

21. Do you get any flack about selling products from the

colleges/universities? Yep, they don't like it much. In part, the bookstore is to have a sort of monopoly on product sales. But if you do two things, the college seems placated. One, don't talk about product sales when you talk with your bookers. (They seem pleased not to know since the bookstore option simply doesn't work for one-day programs.) And tread lightly when selling. In other words, don't talk much about the products, don't make them mandatory, and keep them very secondary, more a service you provide.

22. What about from your listeners, do they oppose your product selling? The longer you dwell on it, the more they complain. You'd far prefer they don't complain, but if they do, much better to you than to the office. If I sense any resistance at all, when I give my gentle sales pitch I explain that "I'm not here to sell books but rather to help you be aware of the best writing/selling books I know." There are only four hours for the program and sometimes attendees want more information than I can give in that time, so I have chosen the books I use to help them fill in any void. That seems to soften the rumbles against crass commercialism!

23. Last, do I always sell BOR: back of the room? Usually, because it's easier to move the tables in or around back there, and the products are seen as folks take breaks or as they leave. But sometimes the rooms make it necessary to do SOR (side of room) and FOR (front of room). You do what you must do, but over time I've made more money with BOR than the other two.

Those are the questions I've been asked over the years about BOR sales. I hope this helps if you speak and you want to offer additional written or audio information through products.

Gordon Burgett