Events Guide for MSPs and VARs

From webinars to tradeshows to open houses, here's how to profit from events large and small.

By Casey Morgan

Events aren't just for the big guys. Whether you're a VAR with a couple of busy people or a large MSP with a marketing department, you can find benefits from throwing an event. This guide is designed to help you see what you can achieve from hosting an event, what some of your event goals should be, how you can throw a variety of types of event, and most importantly, how you can get some free money from StorageCraft to help. And remember, events can be easy and inexpensive and still produce the results you're looking for.

Before we get too far, it's worth noting that StorageCraft has a variety of white-labeled marketing materials available for your use. Things like direct mail marketing templates, graphics, white papers, and more are all available for MSPs partnered with StorageCraft. You can use these materials to hand out at your event or to help you invite more people to your event.

Simply login to our partner portal, find a template you like, add your company's logo, and order it through a service like Vista Print. It's inexpensive, easy, and effective.

Planning your event

The idea of hosting an event might sound daunting or expensive, but the amount of money and effort you put in depends on the type of event you hope to have and what your specific goals are. There's a type of event for every budget and for every size of IT solution provider.

Yes, it will take time to plan the event and do things properly whether it's something simple like a webinar, or something more complex like a lunch and learn or day-long event, just remember that well-executed events can build client loyalty, increase brand awareness, and help you find new clients. With events, you really get out what you put in.

Budgeting

How much money you're willing to allocate to an event will certainly affect the type of event you hope to host, just remember that you can still host things like webinars if you've got very little budgeted—they really only take a little time, not a lot of money.

Of course, nobody wants to spend money without seeing ROI, which is why looking at budget first is important. If your goal is to sell more of your services or products, you need to make sure you don't spend too much money trying to get them. If you're hoping to find new clients, it's important to make sure the cost per lead is low so that you can see a lot of ROI on your event.

Carefully look at your budget to determine how much you can spend on an event and how many sales or new clients you'll need to get to account for the cost of the event. You want to come out on top with new sales and clients, not throw money away on unsuccessful events, so be realistic about what you can afford to spend and what you hope to gain.

Goals

Budget and goals are closely related because in some cases, spending more money on a bigger event will produce more results and accomplish more of your goals. Once you've thought about your budget, here are some goals you might have.

To increase sales

If your plan is to sell more services to clients, an event can definitely help with that. Some IT service providers take care of a client's basic needs without looking at ways to sell more services. It's pretty easy to neglect the idea of cloud backups, mobile device

management, print, or other premium services, but an event can help your clients see the benefits in these types of services if you explain how they can benefit from taking advantage of them.

To find new clientele

A good way for an MSP to guarantee they make money is to have plenty of clients. The right type of event aimed at a good target audience for MSP services can yield new clients. Yes, this can take a lot of work, and there are situations where you have plenty of attendees and only one red-hot lead, but just adding one new, high-caliber client can produce the ROI you hope to get out of an event.

To educate existing clients

We've written a few articles about how training your clients can make things easier on an IT manager, and it's absolutely true. When it comes to cyber-security, teaching clients what not to do can really help them out, and also carries a benefit in that you don't have to fix problems that arise from client mistakes or simple questions. MSPs are in a great position to help out their clients with nearly any IT-related training that might help them (within reason, of course). Empowering them to effectively use the technology you implement can really strengthen your relationship and make them better, safer computer users.

To educate the public

Offering free classes or seminars can help spread word-of-mouth about what your business offers, while also giving you some warm-and-fuzzies for helping out those around you. Chances are the people who show up to something like a computer basics class won't be the type to buy your services, but those interested in cyber-security just might, or at least might know somebody who will. In any case, getting your name out there as an expert who also shares that knowledge with the public can never hurt. Backups have little value by themselves, but a full, quick recovery is indispensable.

To help the community

Perhaps you just want to help out your favorite nonprofit. Fundraising and charity events can help you build a stronger community and carry with them the added benefit of showing people you care.

To discover how you can improve

While you've got clients' or potential clients' attention, it's useful to see what types of services they want or need, because these are things you'll want to provide in the future if you don't provide them already. While you're hosting an event, you should be thinking about what you can learn about their businesses so you can decide how to make things easier for them while also deciding what types of additional services you can provide them as a value-add for them and a revenue increase for you.

Target Audience

Once you've decided what your goals are, decide who exactly you want to speak to.

Current Clients

You may want to target decision-makers in a position to buy any new services you're promoting. If your goal is education, target anybody that can benefit from learning what you're teaching.

Current client employees

If you're targeting current client's employees, you're probably trying to educate them about security threats, online security best-practices, or things of that nature. Remember that the more they understand about security, the easier your job can be in the long run.

Potential clients

These are people you're trying to sway towards your services, so your event will need to center around either why your managed services are superior to providers they currently have, or why they might want to consider using managed services.

The public

This is slightly different than potential clients, but anybody who attends one of your events can still be treated as a potential client. You can host free events that teach the public about computers, networking, or whatever they might benefit from knowing. People who attend may mention that you provide managed services to someone they know, which can in turn lead to more work. Plus, it's always great to help out your community by sharing your expert knowledge.

Choosing Your Event Type

Where your event will take place depends on your budget and the type of event you choose. This section explores different types of event you may choose to host along with the locations each of these events might take place.

Something simple like a webinar will be all it takes to educate some of your existing clients about security issues or other computer-related things, or to promote services you'd like to make them aware of. On the other side of this, having an in-person event at your office or exhibiting at a trade show can give you the opportunity to display your expertise in person, answer questions, and spend time chatting with attendees.

Online Events

Webinars

Webinars are pretty simple to put together. All you really need is a webinar service and a slide presentation about your topic, whether it's a service promo, an educational presentation, or whatever. Webinars are simple, fast, and inexpensive, but remember that they lack that in-person touch.

Services like Go To Meeting allow you to host a webinar very easily and even let you create your own signup page. You can email the link out to clients or any leads you've got (if you're targeting new clients), or even call and invite them on the phone. There are a number of other services you can use to host a webinar, take a look at this list to find one that suits you. Also see "presentations" sidebar for more info.

Online Q&A session or AMA

AMA stands for ask me anything and was popularized by the social news site Reddit. Essentially, an AMA is an online Q&A session. You can host your own AMA using one of the webinar hosting services we already mentioned above, but instead of walking attendees through a presentation like a webinar, you open the floor to any and all IT-related questions they might have. This might be most beneficial with existing clients or their employees who want to learn more about IT, your services, or anything they've got on their minds that you can help them with.

In-Person Events

There are many types of events you can host, and there are certainly those that will fit certain businesses better than others. Not all of the following events will be right for your business, but there are certainly those that you can benefit from.

Before we talk about the types of events, here are some things you might need for an in-person event:

- A location (conference room, banquet hall, etc.)
- Invite list
- Program (what will you talk about or present?)
- Decorations
- Refreshments or catering
- Audiovisuals (projector, laptop, speakers etc.)
- Slide deck for presentations
- Handouts (pamphlets, white papers, etc.)
- Name badges (if appropriate)
- Pens and notepads
- Business cards
- Giveaways (see "giveaways" sidebar)

Giveaways

Offering a giveaway item like an iPad, tech device, or gift card at your event can help you generate more leads and attendees, just bear in mind that there could be those who only show up for a chance at the free stuff. This means that while you'll likely get more attendance and leads, not every single lead is going to be solid.

One way to curb this type of behavior is to use a giveaway that's tied to your services. This could be something like a free assessment, a percentage off a certain service, or something similar.

What you'll choose to giveaway will depend on audience and context, but giveaways can be effective for a number of different events and don't have to be expensive. Giveaways are a nice addition to nearly any of the events we discuss in this guide.

Lunch and learns

A lunch and learn is exactly what it sounds like: you lure attendees to your presentation with free food. Lunch and learns can be easy and usually last up to an hour. Catering arrangements can be as simple and inexpensive as sandwiches or pizza, or you can go for something fancier if it's in the budget. Either way, tasty food is always a good draw. You can host the session in your own conference room or, if your audience is a little bigger, in a restaurant or hotel banquet facility.

Large companies also sometimes host their own in-house lunch and learn series. If you can score an invite to one of these, all you have to do is show up with food and your presentation. If there are big employers near you that are good prospects for your services, check with their HR departments to see if you can get booked as a speaker. Keep your talk crisp, concise and focused on things that you'd give up your own lunch hour to learn. An hour should be ample time to cover your topic in 30-40 minutes, followed by a brisk Q&A. By all means mention your services, but keep it brief and make sure that the majority of your content has real instructional value. See the Presentations sidebar for more practical tips.

Open houses

A lot of businesses will have an open-house and invite local area businesses to drop by during a certain window of time. Reasons for hosting an open house could be to celebrate your business's anniversary, to bring awareness to your move to a new location, or just to meet local businesses. You can advertise this event through social media, at your local chamber of commerce, or even through direct mail. If it will drive attendance and it's within your budget, it can't hurt. As with any event, it's

useful to provide snacks and beverages for people who drop by to meet you. Also, have your business card and pamphlets outlining your services ready for those who are interested.

In-house seminars and classes

You can host a variety of events at your office. A lot of the value you bring to your clients is in your expertise, so it's always useful to be ready to teach them and help them out. Plus, teaching can be a lot of fun. Consider having a weekly seminar on various topics and leave it open to not just existing clients, but the public as well, because as we've noted, you never know who might want your services, or who might know someone who is interested.

Community or tradeshow events

Industry trade shows are happening all the time. If your business works well with a specific industry (like the healthcare or legal industry), keep your eyes peeled for a local event where people in these industries meet. Even if you don't have a specific focus and handle many business types, you can still attend events hosted by your local chamber of commerce or other organization. Exhibiting at these types of events can put you in a position to meet hundreds of local business owners that might want some of your services.

These types of events can be a lot of work and require a little more investment for exhibiting costs. The up side is that they help you raise awareness about your business with a lot of people at once and getting even one or two new deals may offset your costs in addition to bringing you new repeat revenue.

Presentations

Many, if not most types of event we've discussed involve you or a staff member giving some type of presentation. When you're talking about giving a presentation, you need to prepare ahead of time and be sure to practice—you won't sound authoritative if you're fumbling over your words or if your slides contain errors.

Remember that your slides are not the presentation. They're just a visual aid to support you as the presenter. Try to stick to one main idea and image per slide, using just a few key words to reinforce the main points you want your audience to remember. Avoid dense or lengthy text and resist the temptation to use too many colors, fonts, or distracting transitions, and be sure to proofread and practice before you present and you'll be fine.

Also keep in mind that there's a wide variety of presentations you might give and it's not always appropriate to pitch your services right off the bat, unless that's what that particular presentation is about. For educational presentations, promote good quality information first then briefly mention your services at the very end. In any case, make sure your presentation speaks to the appropriate audience.

5 |

Charity or fundraising events

If you're eager to give back to the community, you can host a charity and fundraising event to help out your favorite nonprofit. Rent a space or host in your office and get as many customers, employees, friends, and families as you can to show up. Make it a fun event that raises awareness about a particular cause and you'll have plenty of attendees. You can have charity auctions and raffles to raise more money and to fill the event with plenty of interesting attractions.

More event opportunities

We've suggested a few popular event types that have yielded great results for our global partners, but the variations are limitless. Don't be afraid to get creative; we've even heard of partners doing things like "shoot and learns" where a brief presentation is followed by some trap shooting. Your only limits are your budget and your imagination. Here are a few other kinds of events you might host or sponsor:

- Any event with many business leaders
- Business dinners
- Chamber of commerce events
- Customer Appreciation day/night
- Education programs (local community colleges or tech schools)
- Golf tournaments
- Holiday parties
- Hospitality suites
- Industry trade groups
- Networking events
- Sporting events (skybox or similar setting)
- Sports teams
- VIP gatherings nearby larger tradeshows

Additional tips for events

Partnerships

If you have a few local businesses with whom you're already friendly, it can be very beneficial to host an event together. Also, consider other businesses your customers have relationships with. Can you develop strategic alliances with them that can yield helpful co-marketing relationships? Partnering with others not only allows you to share the expense and effort, but also connects you with all of your co-host's contacts. This can multiply the number of qualified leads who learn about your services for a fraction of the cost.

Sponsor events

Sponsoring events is a good way to not only market your brand, but to meet with local business leaders. This differs from other items in this guide because instead of hosting the event, you lend a hand to help sponsor someone else's event. Don't discount the idea of sponsoring corporate sports teams or things like that because getting your name out there in a positive light can never hurt, and plenty of people will be exposed to your brand.

Get started with MDF

Once you've given some thought to what type of event you'd like to do, you might wonder where to go from there. How do you plan this and more importantly, how do you pay for it?

Well, as we mentioned, StorageCraft is here to support your event with marketing development funds (MDF). This is essentially free money from StorageCraft to help you hold an event. MSPs and VARs who have used MDF to host an event have shown some significant increases in revenue shortly following the event. Put simply, MDF can get you results.

Contact your StorageCraft sales associate to learn more about MDF and to explore all of the possible events StorageCraft can help you hold.

Getting the Word Out

Invitations

Before you can host an event, you need to get people to show up. This involves doing some marketing. How you promote your event will depend on the type of event you're throwing, but promotion works best if you use a variety of these methods:

- Email invites
- Social Media blasts
- Phone Calls
- Direct mail pieces
- Advertisements (print media)
- Word of mouth

Remember that StorageCraft has a few of these things available for you to use. Current partners can access these by logging into the StorageCraft Partner Portal and clicking **resources.** The white-labeled marketing materials available there are useful for things like direct-mail or email invitations you can send those you wish to invite to your events.

Marketing Lists

If your goal involves inviting existing clients then you already have their contact info. If, however, you're trying to find new business, you might not have a lengthy list of people to invite*. Luckily, there are a few places you can look to get the names of businesses you might like to invite to your event.

*Be sure to follow all CAN-SPAM or other email regulations when sending multiple emails to businesses.

Chamber of Commerce

Many local chambers of commerce can give you a list of the types of business you're targeting, let's say, local businesses over five employees or something like that. Once you've got business names, addresses, and numbers, you can send direct mail pieces or call them to invite them to whatever event it is you're hosting.

NAICS and SIC Codes

The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) and Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) are systems used to classify industries and business using a code. There are databases available online that allow you target specific industries in your area so you can find the names, numbers, and addresses of any businesses on file so you can invite them to the event you have in mind.

7 |

The Yellow Pages

The tried-and-true method of opening the Yellow Pages (digitally or otherwise) can give you the names of local businesses in industries you think might like to attend your event.

Killing It at Your Event

Looking good

If you're exhibiting, you'll want to look nice at your booth, which means you've got to dress sharply and have nice branding. Here are some questions to answer before you exhibit at an event:

- Do you have banners with your logo or other branded booth decor?
- Do you have shirts with your logo for your exhibitors to wear?
- Do you have any prizes or giveaways?
- Do you have something to put business cards in?
- Do you have any branded gifts or tchotchkes to hand out?
- Do you have any marketing or sales collateral? (e.g. brochures and lists of available services?)
- If you host regular education sessions, do you have schedules you can hand out?

If you're inviting people to your office, be sure to keep things neat and clean as attendees arrive, don't be afraid to keep some sales collateral and business cards around, and try to make the location look as inviting as possible.

Personality

You'll need to be ready to talk to people if you're exhibiting or inviting people to your office, so be jovial, smile, and show a genuine interest in the people you're talking to. Get to know them, ask what they do, what they're doing at the conference, and what they hope to get out of it. When the time is right, you can bring up what you're doing there and what your company has to offer. Once all that's settled, you can exchange cards, which brings us to the next part.

Leads

Leads are a big part of this whole process. Anybody you speak to or who drops a card in your lead-capture bowl is someone you may be able to sell services to. As you're getting business cards, it's smart to mark each card to note how interested that person was. Marking leads as either cold, warm, or hot will help you remember the most important ones later on—those are the ones that you should follow up with right away.

Post-Event Follow-Up

Lead follow-up

Whether it's a webinar or a tradeshow, one common mistake is not following up on leads after an event— the whole point is to find leads! If you wait too long, your prospect might have little recollection of who you are (depending on the type of event), so make sure you follow up via phone call or email as soon as you can— it doesn't make any sense to put the time and effort into hosting an event if you can't follow up on all the leads you get from it. This stage is critical because it's how you can maximize ROI you get from the event.

If you have a list of people who signed up to attend but didn't make it, be sure to follow-up with them as well to say "sorry we missed you." Be sure to keep this contact info so you can invite these people to any events you might host in the future, or to include them in future email campaigns you might have.

ROI

You need to compare the cost of the event (time, effort, materials, etc.) to what you actually gained from it. This step is crucial because you can't say an event was successful unless it eventually makes your business more money than you spent putting it on. If you lost money, it might be that you didn't have enough people in attendance, or perhaps you just have rotten luck. In any case, you need to look at your gains and losses so you know if you want to host another event in the near future.

Next steps

Did you have a successful event or did you have some poor luck? If your event went well, it's useful to think about what made it so great so you can reproduce the event and hopefully get the same results. If the event went poorly, you'll need to identify what it is you can do to improve. Was there poor attendance? What can you do to increase attendance next time? Was there great attendance but no viable leads? Maybe you should consider hosting a different type of event that would be more interesting to the types of people you're trying to target? Another option is to follow up with attendees in the form of a survey asking them to rank the quality of various aspects of an event, whether it's the food, the presentations, the amount of time it took, and so forth. Some good free survey tools are:

- [Survey Monkey](#)
- [Google Forms](#)

Conclusion

Depending on how well your event went, you might want to plan on hosting another one in the near future. If the type of event you hosted didn't work out so well, you might consider putting together a simpler event like a webinar or a basic lunch and learn. Just because you had a little trouble doesn't mean you can't see better results with a different type of event. Don't give up if things didn't quite go as planned, especially if you've never hosted an event. As with anything, there can be a learning curve and just because your first one didn't take off doesn't mean you need to give up—there's plenty of ROI to be gained from various events if you stick with it.

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About StorageCraft

At StorageCraft®, the goal of complete disaster recovery drives everything we do. Our StorageCraft® Recover-Ability™ solution is an end-to-end, best-in-class backup and disaster recovery solution that is both fast and reliable.

StorageCraft Recover-Ability

It starts with a good backup. Our award-winning *StorageCraft® ShadowProtect®* takes complete, pristine images of your machines, including all your operating systems, applications, services, and settings.

It then records changes at the sector level, so you always have an up-to-date copy of every machine in your IT environment, whether it's a critical server or an employee laptop, physical or virtual. We even work with specialized database servers, like SQL, SharePoint, or Exchange. You can get granular recovery in Exchange with *ShadowProtect Granular Recovery for Exchange*.

You have complete control over the frequency of your backups and you can set rules for consolidation and retention to manage your precious storage space using *StorageCraft® ImageManager™*.

Plus, with *StorageCraft® ShadowControl®* you can monitor the machines in your backup environment from a single interface and get alerts when a machine is running out of space, when a backup doesn't happen, or when any of a variety of conditions you specify is met.

We also give you tools to test your backups using *StorageCraft® VirtualBoot™* and *StorageCraft® Image-Ready™* technologies, which gives you confidence that your data is safe and that a disaster won't shut you down or hold you up.

Then we make it easy to replicate your backup images with *StorageCraft® Cloud Services™* or to our cloud or to your own offsite location so you can always have your data close when you need it and at a good safe distance when a disaster comes.

When it does, you can launch your backups as virtual machines with VirtualBoot or mount them as drives for complete, granular access to your data.

Or you can pre-stage the recovery of a backup image in a virtual machine with our patented *StorageCraft®*

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HeadStart Restore® technology, so if your main server blows up, you can be up and running in minutes. You can even virtualize your data in our cloud so even Mother Nature can't keep you down.

Then, you can rebuild your infrastructure and recover to all kinds of machines, physical or virtual, using our *StorageCraft Hardware® Independent Restore™* technology or *ShadowProtect IT Edition*.

You can't be sure what kind of disaster will strike you next, but with the StorageCraft Recover-Ability solution, you can be sure it doesn't matter. You'll be just fine.

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