







KEVIN VAN DER STRAETEN

# eventplanner

How to Organise Impactful Events

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# Foreword



When I wrote my first Events book almost 15 years ago, I never imagined that it would reach the top of the 'bestseller' list. Originally, the book was intended to inspire those commissioning and arranging events to organise better ones, but it soon became clear that the book was also popular in the educational world and even with seasoned professionals. In the years following the book's publication, the event industry evolved dramatically and has now grown into a fully-fledged professional field in its own right. I am also proud that with [eventplanner.net](https://eventplanner.net) we have been able to make a contribution to this professionalisation through our books, TV shows, podcasts, websites and event software.

This book, *eventplanner*, that you now have in your hands is the fourth and fully revised version of that original edition. Of course, all the practical aspects of event organisation have been thoroughly updated. At the same time, I will show you how your marketing can achieve even more spectacular results, how you can better ensure the safety of your event, and how you can deal effectively with cyber security and privacy. In addition, I will also tell you everything you need to know about organising a wedding – and all this in addition to the broader knowledge contained in the most widely sold book ever written for event organisers. In short, *eventplanner* is a complete toolbox to turn your event, whatever it might be, into a huge success.

People have been organising events for thousands of years. Think, for example, of the gladiator contests of Ancient Rome, the Olympic Games of Ancient Greece or the sumptuous royal banquets of the Middle Ages. However, it is only during the last decade that event marketing has acquired what might

be called 'top sport' status. As an event planner, you are no longer the person who simply arranges the necessary logistics, such as finding and hiring a band, a venue, the catering, and so on. Instead, you are now like a film director, who immerses your guests in a wonderful experience, creating emotions and added value for those attending the event and for the person(s) who commissioned it.

At some time or other, everyone organises an event, whether professionally or privately: an adventurous teambuilding, an inspirational congress, the annual staff dinner, a customer event, a festival, a wedding reception, or even just your child's birthday party. With this book, I will guide you on your way with dozens of practical tips and useful checklists. I will help you to become the hero of your event.

Although the book has strong theoretical and scientific foundations, I have deliberately chosen to write it in an accessible style and with a pragmatic focus, avoiding too much jargon and boring theory. Whoever reads between the lines will discover the necessary depth for themselves.

The book was developed with the cooperation of dozens of professionals from the event industry and educators in event management.

Throughout the book I regularly give links to our website, where you can find additional information and videos. You can use these sources when you want to zoom in more closely on a particular aspect of event organisation.

Do you have any questions after reading *eventplanner*? Or would you like extra tips and examples for the practical sections? Please feel free to mail me via [kevin@eventplanner.net](mailto:kevin@eventplanner.net).

Kevin Van der Straeten  
Founder *eventplanner.net*



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# Why organise your event?

It is tempting to immediately start with the practical planning of your event. This is only logical; after all, it is the most fun part of the work. Even so, it is smarter to first do all your homework thoroughly. With events, you never get a second chance to put things right. So you need to get everything that matters right first time. You can be sure that Murphy's Law will always be waiting for its chance to strike. This is the unwritten law that states "if something can go wrong, it will go wrong". You can only avoid this by ensuring that your event is properly prepared, right down to the very last detail. If you fail to do this, you run the risk that your event will not give the desired results or will cost you more time and money than was really necessary.

## WHY?

The first question you need to ask yourself is 'why' you are organising an event. You might think that you know this. But you may be wrong. What do you really want to achieve with your event? An event is never an end in itself. It is always a means to an end, to something else. In a business context, for example, you probably want to influence your guests, to persuade them to change their behaviour in some way. Your aim might be to give them a positive feeling about your brand, or to make them buy more of your products, or to make them loyal in the long term to those products. And even beneath this motivation lies a deeper 'why'. Consider the case of Apple. It is stating the obvious to say that they want to sell more iPhones. But why do they want to do that? In one of the most widely viewed TED talks, Simon Sinek offers the following explanation for the Apple 'why': *"In everything we do, we believe in challenging the status quo. We believe in thinking differently. The way we challenge the status quo is by making our products beautifully designed, simple to use and user friendly. We just happen to make great computers."* And it is because we all believe in this 'why' that the company is so successful.













At eventplanner.net we want to *inspire you to push your boundaries and help you to organise better events with more impact, so that you can continue to grow*. That is our 'why'. We seek to achieve this by sharing knowledge, creating a strong platform and developing state-of-the-art event software for our users. Of course, we also have commercial ambitions, but this is not what gets us out of bed each morning with the same great passion and enthusiasm for what we do. It is only your 'why' that can do this – and it is something that your target group notices.

What's more, it is not just companies that have intrinsic motivation of this kind. As an individual, you also have a personal 'why'. Even when you are organising something like a wedding reception, you still have a story to tell. For example, you might want your family and friends to witness your marriage vows or to share in this important moment in your life. If you have the real 'why' clear in the back of your mind, you will organise a very different event than if you rush straight away into the organisational side of things without thinking things through. Does this all sound a bit far-fetched? Perhaps the following example will convince you.

Events that have a clear 'why' are better and more successful. Do you think that the organisers of Tomorrowland are better than other festival organisers?

**Events that have a clear 'why' are better and more successful.**

Not in my opinion. True, they are brilliant at what they do, but in strict organisational terms they are no better than many others. So, what makes the difference? Why is their festival such a massive worldwide hit? The answer is simple: the organisers had a dream to create a festival that would allow people to briefly escape from their daily lives. They wanted to take their guests to a totally different and colourful world, a place where they could forget about all their worries and become part of a single large family of festivalgoers.

That is the Tomorrowland 'why' and that is what makes their event so different. Not the DJs. Not the remarkable stages. It is the total package, which perfectly translates the organisers' vision into a concept, so that we now talk automatically about 'People of Tomorrow'. These people are a close-knit community, a tribe of followers and ambassadors that make the event into something much greater than the organisers could ever have dreamed of. The festival is worth talking about because its 'why' is authentic and we all believe in it 100 percent. Or as Simon Sinek has put it: "People don't buy 'what' you do; they buy 'why' you do it."

Do you find it difficult to identify your 'why' or the 'why' of your company or the person requesting the organisation of an event? If so, read the book

Start with *Why* by Simon Sinek. It is highly recommended! Would you prefer a shorter summary? Watch my interview on this subject on eventplanner.tv:

 [www.eventplanner.net/book/tv-why](http://www.eventplanner.net/book/tv-why)



Perhaps you think that this all makes sense for a festival, but you are only organising a congress, a business event or even a small private party. Surely it doesn't apply in these cases? Yes, it does. The principle is always the same. A strong story ensures that people will want to be part of your event. Just look at the example of TEDx, which also started off as something small, but quickly grew into a phenomenal international concept because of its passion to "share strong ideas with the world".

All too often organisers attempt to copy the 'why' of others, instead of finding a 'why' of their own. They seem to think that imitating a tried and tested concept is a sure-fire way to earn money quickly. Of course, they all fail, time after time. If your 'why' is not authentically yours, you will soon lose all credibility with your target public and the concept will no longer work its magic.

In other words, your 'why' is the basis for telling your story. Storytelling might be widely promoted as the new hip marketing trend, but people have been telling stories as a way of communicating a particular message for centuries. It is a language that allows you to create an experience that makes it possible for your guests to become involved in your event at different levels. And, as an organiser, that is exactly what you need. People stand in queues all night long for the launch of a new iPhone, not because they need a new phone, but because they believe in the story that Apple tells. And it is the same with Starbucks. You can drink a delicious cup of coffee almost everywhere, but Starbucks offers something more: its stores are meeting places that create an experience around coffee, a place where you like to go with your friends. Even the simple writing of your name on their cups has become a kind of 'cult' happening. You need to find a way to tell the story of your event in a similar manner. This will make all the difference between a perfectly orchestrated, but essentially soulless succession of event elements, and an event experience that touches people emotionally, so that they will still talk about it long after it is over.

**Organisers  
are sellers  
of emotion.**

Jan Vereecke, the organiser of the successful 'Night of the Proms' concerts thinks that organisers must be 'sellers of emotion'. And he is right. Of course,

the success of NOTP is based in part on its original mix of classical and pop music, but the event would never have lasted for as many years as it has without the energy and enthusiasm of the orchestra and its conductor. "People come to the Night of the Proms and other concerts to recharge their emotional batteries with positive energy. There needs to be laughter, but there can also be a tear or two. Above all, it has to be a celebration."

Remember, however, that to tell a good story you need more than just a 'why'. You need to have people in your story and you need to have a link with your target audience. The listener, your guest, must be able to recognise himself (or herself) in your story and feel in some way involved in it. I interviewed journalist Tim Verheyden on precisely this subject. He expressed the principle perfectly: "Imagine that you are making a report about a sad subject, like hunger in Africa. You could make a straightforward report about a youngster begging on the street to get enough money for food. But those are circumstances that people in Europe or the USA are not familiar with and cannot relate to. But if I make a story about a youngster begging on the street that also involves a dilemma – for example, 'Should I use the little money I have collected to buy food for myself or for my dying mother?' – this becomes the kind of story that is better known to me and my public, because it is about the hard choices that you sometimes have to make in life." If you want your event to excite people's emotions, you need to make sure that your story touches and moves your target group.

## EVENTS AS PART OF THE MARKETING MIX

It is remarkable that events are still sometimes seen as 'stand alone' activities. In reality, an event is just one of the communication tools that marketers can use to reach their target group. As a company, you use event marketing as an integrated part of your marketing mix. It contributes towards your wider marketing objectives and is the common thread in all the communication that you generate online, offline and live.

Red Bull is a good example of this. The company does not organise events involving extreme sports as an end in itself. For them, these events are contact moments with their target audience that allows them to project their message and, ultimately, sell more energy drinks. And if you read between the lines, you can see that Red Bull has a very clear 'why': "Red Bull gives you wings and wants people to push their boundaries as far as they will go." Their story is perfectly translated into an event concept that has an authentic ring. Many companies would not take the risk of linking their image to extreme