

2023 Road Race Management Conference

ALL Session Notes

Mark's Disclaimer – These are just my notes and should not be construed as the absolute facts or entire content of any presentation. They are provided in the event they help you remember high points of the awesome content provided. Special thanks to all the terrific presenters!

Session 1: Compensating Staff and Volunteers

Sean Ryan | director@fall50.com | 920.606.2458

Sean is a logistics/busing specialist amongst other things

Loves top 10 lists

Has run Boston Marathon course with Dave M. 12 times

Audio/Visual specialist and slideshow builder

Part time Willy Wonka impersonator (ask him)

Volunteering

- Volunteering is on the decline
- Races must market to volunteers directly
- 85% of volunteers come from groups, 15% individual
- 90% of races pay the group/non-profit for the volunteer time
- Volunteers think in terms of hourly rates, so should race directors
- \$10.70 is average pay for an hour of volunteering
- Incentives include shirt, food, community service credits and event passes (transferrable best)
- Having a volunteer appreciation event is key

Staffing

- Day rate for part time leaders is popular
- Consider pay incentives for repeat leaders
- Apps are available for volunteer check in (some registration providers may offer this service too)
- It's ideal if you can pay directly after the event before they leave
- Los Angeles Cast & Crew model is interesting
- College Hunks is a good labor source

Other

- Consider creating distinctive swag (jackets?) for volunteer and staff leaders (gift bags nice too)
- Keep your leaders together (Bix7 model) so they feel like a team
- Some events (Houston, Twin Cities) use an affiliation committee that meets year round
- Always verify insurance of independent contractors

- Understand the issues that may arise from using contractors vs employees (“misclassification tax issue”)

Session 2: Communications Best Practices

Andrea Dowdy | andrea@runcolfax.org | 303.587.6676

Andrea came from a marketing role at Disney
 The Denver Colfax Marathon is 9 events on race weekend
 3 events sell out
 Event growth has been solid

Email Overview

- Subject line is critical
- Use a combo of HUMOR / BREVITY / STANDOUT LANGUAGE / VISUALS

Staff Communications

- Subject line should be very detailed
- Always send to one person and make that clear in body of note, as they are responsible for the response, not the cc’s
- Provide deadlines
- Decide who on staff is allowed to handle emergency questions or issues on race day

Race Emails

- Limit emails, too many will mean fewer opens
- Point readers back to race website for info
- Minimize repetitive emails
- Do not lead most emails with “price increase coming” – BORING
- Make participant emails fun (see subject line tips)
- Great subject line ideas: “Shirt reveal...” “Last 10...” “Best runner gift...” “Price increase soon...” (not specific so other content can lead)

Race Website

- The hub of all things
- Keep current
- Have a way to share emergency information prominently – with a timestamp
- Have a part of your website where all the key logistics info exists laid out clearly

Other Marketing / Comms Tips

- Apps are nice, but start with a mobile enabled website
- Use simple graphics when communicating key dates, times, locations, events
- Make one good race video, then clip and repurpose
- Collect mobile numbers through your registration partner (ask if registration partner can collect numbers and provide texting through their platform)

- Do not put event details in social media, point everyone back to the website. SM is for engagement, not for key comms
- Create one or two key pieces, post/send them as pdfs, and highly recommend PRINTING them to the participants
- A Race Day hints/tips with bib pick up and other data is a good key piece
- Repurpose your content over and over, with different photos
- Use the phone if an email response is too complex or if back-and-forth begins to occur
- No FAQ, use Logistics and How To guides instead
- Keep an operations guide password protected on website for staff use

Other Good Ideas

- The “get your photo with a firefighter” idea is genius
- Medal scavenger hunt reveal
- Include pets and animals in promos
- Put images of unique or fun parts of course in emails
- Add a community art element to your event
- Print key info on back of bibs

Session 3: Timing Anatomy

Ryan Morris | ryan@delmopro.com | 765.760.3980

Times many large events

Enjoys bourbon

Timing savant

Overview Notes

- 98% of data produced by system is on audience phones in <2 seconds
- Almost all timing has moved to cloud based, so internet is critical
- Dynamic bib assignment is common
- Use of expo timing mats is increasing and a good idea for future planning and tracking
- Timing mat at expo allows for dynamic content to appear on an Led sign if interested
- Mobile app use is growing for tracking purposes
- Mobile app vs web app will remain a debate
- Next iteration may be integration of wearables (NOT for official timing, but for course tracking, bio metrics, etc.)
- The ability to use app push notifications is a great sponsor traffic driver on race day
- Make sure your timer has multisource internet
- Starlink is a great option for timers/backup/internet diversification
- Best timers will have redundancy of internet provider with auto switching you never notice
- Triathlons are likely to continue to need active tracking/chips
- Weblink live tracking allows for awards pickup recording
- Heat mapping is a relatively new feature which can help in event planning

- A timing manual is critical, ask to see it
- Should timing provide registration? Not necessary as long as good registration providers continue to cloud share data and immediately post results, etc effectively
- Cheating can be minimized with age grading, also can be used for handicapping for fun cross-age competition

Session 4: Event Anatomy

Michelle Juehring | bix7michelle@gmail.com | 608.386.3011

Ironman Triathlete

Quad-City Times Bix7: 11,000-15,000 event participants

7 mile and 2 mile event

Famous for its accomplished athletes (Joan B, Bill R, Meb)

Famous for its former race director (Ed)

Michelle jumped into some big shoes to fill, and is filling them well

Overview Notes

- Out and back course is one of the hallmarks of the event
- Beat the Elite element of race is fantastic
- Wal Mart and local newspaper are key sponsors
- All athletes and volunteers get name in printed paper
- 2024 is 50th event anniversary
- Teams is a critical element
- Consider doing age group awards in reverse order (oldest to youngest)

“Michelle’s Opportunities”

Learn from the best (Ed)

Be optimistic (handling of covid)

Streamline (improve in increments, as to not disrupt what works)

Let it Go (there are things that won’t go as expected, and one must keep moving)

Summary Thoughts

The Bix7 is amazing in so many ways that it was a great study and discussion. It’s location and tradition make it special and enduring. I was so moved by Michelle’s presentation that my wife and I will be traveling to Iowa to volunteer and participate in the event in 2024!

Session 5: Event Planning: Before and After

Dave McGillivray | dmse@dmsesports.com | 617.212.6002

Dave needs no introduction

But please note...he once dropped walkie-talkie in porta-john and chose to retrieve it :]

Overview Notes

- Dave’s home address medals – wonderful idea - 395/400 returned

- Sets clocks ahead 2 weeks prior to event – prep for race day is not for the day before
- No critical comms in last two weeks – participants need to be prepared by then (marathon)
- Write the post-race report format as you prepare for the event, not after
- Answer your emails, over communicate
- Have priorities and know what to let go of when it's too close to event day
- Every volunteer and participant is as important as anyone else, treat them as such
- Smile a lot and remain calm, even if you must hide behind a tree for a moment – enthusiasm is contagious
- You are a caretaker of the event, make sure you treat it as such for those who come after you
- Use your budget as a decision making tool
- Have a master contact information list/database
- Get athlete results to them as soon as possible
- Major event? Consider having back up finish line prepared

Session 6: Event Timelines and Scheduling

Laurel Park | laurelpark114@gmail.com

Past President – Ann Arbor Track Club
Highly competitive runner - 5k, 10k, half marathon

PLEASE NOTE: I was not able to see Laurel's entire presentation

Overview Notes

- Operations manuals are critical
- Choose to automate as you grow, it will save time and frustration
- Don't get sucked into using new software if you don't need it
- Google Suite is a fantastic way to manage your event
- Use software permissioning systems to allow only key people to make changes to critical data

Laurel is VERY thoughtful, detailed, and efficient leader. She is a great resource for questions on how to manage your event and automate processes

WRAP UP AND FUTURE THOUGHTS

- Let's help Tracy pull off the World Athletics Road Running Championships in San Diego in 2025 – tracysundlun@gmail.com

Possible topics for 2024

- Road race running must continue to evolve to serve the next generations – those under 35 (roughly) seek their experiences in different ways, and digital is a big part
- Permitting challenges – timelines are getting too tight, what are the best practices

- Managing gender categories – regarding registration, awards and more
 - Drug testing - managing “purse snatching” runners
 - Event costs / Registration fees
 - Prize money and awards creativity
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Special thanks to Phil and Jeff for a wonderful event.

This was the first time RaceReach attended, and we'll be back! Thanks to all of you who made me feel welcome amongst your fantastic group of event directors and industry partners.