

2024 Road Race Management Conference

*Below are highlights of my interpretations of what was presented in each session. Please see the slide decks or contact the presenter for specific information. My favorite notes are marked with ***.*

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Welcome | Phil Stewart, Editor and Publisher, Road Race Management | pstewart@rrm.com 301.802.2194

We're back for the 42nd time!

Event participation records being broken weekly

COVID created runners, now those runners are participating in organized events too

All boats rise with growth – event revenue, event support businesses

Sponsorship Overview | Andrea Dowdy CEO & Executive Director, Denver Colfax Marathon | andrea@runcolfax.org 303.587.6676

Understanding Sponsors

Two types:

Altruistic

Services

*****Industry Categories most common for race sponsorships**

Healthcare #1

Athletics – shoes

Athletics - gear

Auto dealers

Grocery

Bank

Airlines

Sponsorship Trends

Races are competing with festivals and other social activities as much as other races

Most cash deals are year-to-year

***Sponsors have less energy to get heavily involved in activation – pull them in!

More in-kind offerings

***Races are increasingly being thought of as Charity + Racing events – opportunity for branding

Sponsorship Tips

***Networking is the key to mastering sponsorship pursuit and retention

***Zoom is NOT a good option, despite the desire of your audience

Ask for a budget range – don't be afraid to work to make it fit

***Define whether non -cash sponsors are “budget relieving” – pursue accordingly

Do not “alphabet soup” your logos – treat key sponsor logos as high priority/visibility

Packet pickup running store remains a key element

Create stories around the opportunities – don't just sell placements

Include your key sponsors heavily in race day activities, not just there to watch or display

Offering exclusivity in categories, but keep categories specific and narrow where necessary

***Go all out for your Title Sponsor, always. They are too difficult to replace

***Have a plan for your photographer to get key sponsor related/engagement photos

Lead Opportunities

Who sponsors festivals? Good prospects and categories can be identified this way

Always consider, and visit with, local Chamber of Commerce

***Prospect and meet IN PERSON

“First date” + “Second date” strategies and tactics

First Date - In person

***Build understanding of their goals – no features blabbing

Wow factor matters – consider short video or other excitement

Understand their budget range

***TAKE RISK (Andrea calls this be creative)

***NO PROPOSAL at first date ever

Second Date - In person

***Deliver your proposal aligned with their stated goals, not just with a list of features

***Tweak details only AFTER they commit

Discuss and even deliver timelines and deadlines

*****Keep a database/pattern of your process: *Proposal → Agreement → Activation***

*****CREATIVE RISK IDEAS:**

Car wrapped with logo and runners' names for participant engagement

Post it note exchange (Human Kindness booth)

Oversized check delivery photo opportunities

Back of the pack challenge – elite runner passes = \$1 to charity (can engage sponsors in this)

Post – Event

***Deliver customized Event Summary to all sponsors

***Do it via “We’re bringing you a gift” approach

Make them excited about renewal in that meeting

Use photos with sponsors – see photographer strategy above

Calculating Race Needs | Dave McGillivry, President, DMSE Sports | dmse@dmsesports.com 617.212.6002

TWO OVERARCHING THEMES:

- 1) *****It's all about the numbers – keep your data**, study your data to more accurately predict needs
- 2) *****Plan and execute the basics extremely well.** “Experience enhancements” are great, but they mean very little if the basics are not executed well. Two basics to keep in mind:
 - a. NEVER run out of water
 - b. NEVER allow an opportunity for a runner to get off course

*****4 Key numbers every event director needs to understand and track**

1. Registrants
2. Packet pick-ups
3. Race Starters
4. Race Finishers

Registrants

Determine bib/timing needs

Must be thoughtfully tracked by division/category

Packet Pickup

Determines SWAG needs

Starters

Determines corral space needs (***Dave's 3'x3' cheat code for corral spacing)

Helps determine time to clear start process and course

Must consider porta-john needs

Dave's Porta cheat code

1/100 general rule (porta/starter ratio)

1/75 if race is mostly women

***1/50 makes you a hero

Finishers

Determines medals

Determines post-race food/beverage needs

Requires physical space calculations again

Registration Fees

Use price increases – they work

***Notify participants day of increase (many have found this urgency creation to be the most effective timing of pricing increase emails and social posts)

***Use discount codes carefully – too big at end can make early discounted signups angry and make them wait for the best deal in the future

Dave's No-Show Rate Prediction Guidance

High 20-25%

Average 8-15%

Volunteers 3-8%

Weather a huge variable, but date of signups and transfer policies also affect (GET and KEEP the data)

Dave's Water Station Prediction Guidance

1.5-2 cups per runner at each station

2-3 in warm weather

***DO NOT RUN OUT OF WATER

General

New events are an immense challenge (Dave's cheat code: there isn't one except WAG (wild ass guess))

***Have a plan to transport leftover swag or food away from site

***Use Dynamic Bib Numbering (best Registration providers will have this option)

Cluster porta johns in 5s to make fewer long lines and for effective “turnover”

Use the words “medical encounter” instead of emergencies, injuries, issues, etc

Races with <1,000 participants should not expect to make much, if any profit, especially since they are often fundraisers. Hard costs (permits, police, porta potty, fencing) are too high to allow for the expectation of meaningful profit.

**AI Impact Today and Tomorrow | Doug Thurston, Owner, Thurston
Event Solutions | thurstoneventsolutions@gmail.com
916.802.7668**

Doug deftly navigated an emerging topic. To the benefit of most in the room, he did it from the perspective of understanding our industry VERY well and understanding AI just enough. The discussion was far ranging, often audience-driven, and helpful. I did not really take useful notes, as the session was mostly sharing ideas, learning and a few best practices.

There was a follow up session provided at the conference. I did not attend that.

CONCLUSIONS:

- 1) AI is here to stay, and it will dramatically change our events and lives.
- 2) AI and increasing reliance on phone and computer screens and software will make in-person events like running races even more important and powerful.
- 3) We should not bury our heads in the sand and try to learn as this technology evolves.
- 4) The best industry supporting businesses are already using AI. This is certainly true of Registration and Event Management providers like RaceReach and others.

**Event Insurance | Terry Diller | terrydiller@insmgmt.com
260.494.8718**

Overview

Insurance climate has been very difficult. Costs are high when availability exists

Sports have been affected largely because of concussions and sexual abuse (youth sports especially) / background checks for adult coaches becoming critical

Property insurance is rising due to costs of rebuilding having risen sharply

Cybersecurity is more important than ever – note that breach notification requires written/mailed notification, not just email

Athlete transportation – outsource and use coverage of provider

Rental cars – don't personally rent – use the organization / keep in mind that damage YOU cause is generally not covered by your policy

***Alcohol – far reaching discussion / Outsource when possible / don't directly include alcohol or drink tickets as part of registration – loosely affiliate / giving away alcohol via outsourcing can be less risky for insurance purposes than selling it and making a profit / pay professional bartenders

Directors and Officers insurance should be considered

***Everyone in a small business should consider carrying umbrella insurance on their personal policy

***There is a huge coverage difference between

“Additional insured”

“Additional NAMED insured”

Event cancellation insurance is reputational insurance, regardless of your refund or transfer policy

Permitting | Andrea Dowdy, Dave McGillivry | Doug Thurston

Overview from Dave M:

Can be the hardest part of any event, and may cost \$ to apply

Permits are always one year only, require constant communication

***Use both “bottom up” (police discussions) along with “top down” (city/Mayor’s office discussions) at the same time

***Be hyper-specific on your road closure times

***Bring the permit to the race with you

Be prepared for the permit to be granted only days or weeks before the event

Get permits for equipment use like tents – know and ask what needs to be permitted

Get and submit your insurance as part of permitting discussion and application

TRUST AND VERIFY – the drained lake story

Overview from Andrea D:

***Have alternate course options and permit those too (flood plan, construction plan, etc)

Consider factors that may require a reroute (animal freak-out story)

Always ask for post-event feedback from all stakeholders

Overview from Doug T:

Idea of having an out and back vs loop route (Big Sur story) for alternate course

***Certify your alternate courses

***Some cities are REQUIRED to approve your permit if it meets the requirements (anti-discrimination) – find out if this is true in your city

***Have a detailed First/Last runner plan on time and location - Build in delay time for street reopening

Schedule post-event debriefs when possible with stakeholders

Audience discussion:

Have a detailed plan for busing and parking lot challenges - build in buffer time especially with authorities responsible for closing site (police)

Consider having a retired police officer on your committee – they know how to communicate with officers/leaders

Participant Demographics | Laurel Park | Fmr. Ann Arbor Track Club President | laurelpark114@gmail.com

General Overview

3 categories of participant types

Descriptive – gender, pace, age

Identity – marathoner, newbie, competitive, recreational

Psychological – goals, needs, emotional

Females continue to slightly outnumber males in participation - trends are stable

***Walkers a new-ish category – big impact on street closures

More emphasis continues to go to “mid-pack” and “back of the pack” as growth opportunities

Consider and build for differences between those with a time goal and those with a participation goal

***Consider growth of social element of fitness – groups and teams are increasing in importance

Data (RSU)

Almost 2/3 of their platform’s running participation is at the 5k level

95% of their events have <500 participants

RSU does include data from 7(?) races over 20,000 participants

Discussion

***Including clubs and teams is becoming more important

***The 20-29 demographic is growing – consider short form video to reach them

***Masters runners need a unique approach

Bix 7 Senior Bix success

Demographic trends of size of millennial vs GenX brings more opportunity for growth

They greatly enjoy the community and post-event experience (food, drink, celebration)

Elite Athlete Considerations | Eli Asch | eliasbasch@gmail.com
916.202.2355

Having an Elite program is hard, but often very worth it

Pro purses have not kept up with growth of running overall, for many reasons

Creative approaches can allow any event to benefit from Elite Athletes

- Earned media

- Social media

- Paid media

- Sponsor engagement with elites

- Charity opportunities (back of the pack start, etc)

- TV / livestreaming

Considerations and Ideas

***Using “elite” high school athletes as part of events

Local athletes can be especially impactful – find them

NBC is often the best network to pursue for TV and media coverage (Olympics)

***Using elites for short distances to create the “more race, less chase” – closer elite pack finishes vs faster elite overall time

***Having state, regional and local prizes vs one category or nationwide

Big events – consider international and US elites, but remember-

- Need for translators

- Need for good agents to prep athletes to engage in event

***Your event can be a “tune up” distance for their upcoming big or longer event – know this as you recruit

Consider having a thorough “application” process for elites, however you categorize them – allows you to better story and promote them

Are these runners “Elites” or “Professionals?” – lots of discussion