



iSPARK EVENT PLANNING SURVIVAL GUIDE

VOLUME 1

How to Survive an Event Crisis
Wayfinding | Name Badges



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Krista Benoit is President & CEO of iSPARK Consulting Inc. - a full-service boutique marketing and events agency based in the Ottawa-Gatineau region. Since 2000, the company has executed events all throughout Canada and all over the world, including Salt Lake City (USA), Sydney (Australia) and Pune (India).

Krista is known for her efficient and organized work style, and her attention to detail along with her ability to effectively deliver on commitments, realize objectives and complete projects on time and within budget. She is dedicated to her clients and provides creative solutions tailored to each client's specific needs. Krista brings a tremendous amount of energy and out of the box thinking to every project. Her personal manifesto is *"There is never a crowd on the extra mile"*.

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Introduction

Welcome to the wonderful world of event planning! Volume 1 of our Survival Guide features tips and tricks for stickhandling three important areas of event planning:

- Wayfinding
- Name Badges
- Event Crises

Wayfinding | How to Do it Right!

Boring easel signs to direct your event attendees are officially 'old school'. It's time to add some WOW factor to your wayfinding. It will not only save you hassles onsite during the event, but it will also enhance the event experience for your attendees.

HOW TO KNOW IF YOUR WAYFINDING NEEDS HELP

Are you (or your event volunteers) spending a lot of time explaining to people where to go and how to get there?

Where are the bathrooms?

Where is the lunch room?

Do you know where Company XYZ's trade show booth is located?

If so, your wayfinding needs work.

Wayfinding is an art form – politely and effectively directing event participants is a specialized skill. Good way-finding saves event planners from a plague of questions (and the frustrated attendees that can often accompany them).

WHAT IS WAYFINDING?

It is exactly as it sounds – something to help people find their way from where they are to where they want to be. It helps people orient themselves. Traditional examples of wayfinding include signs and maps, however today's wayfinding may also include sophisticated technology, lighting or artwork.

BUILT-IN WAYFINDING

Some venues have excellent directional infrastructure in place, such as digital signs that can be programmed with your event information. However, most event attendees tend to ignore these or breeze on by. So, you will still need to supplement existing signage with additional wayfinding that is eye catching and branded with your event brand.

Here are some unique and creative ways that we think might give your wayfinding some 'wow' factor!

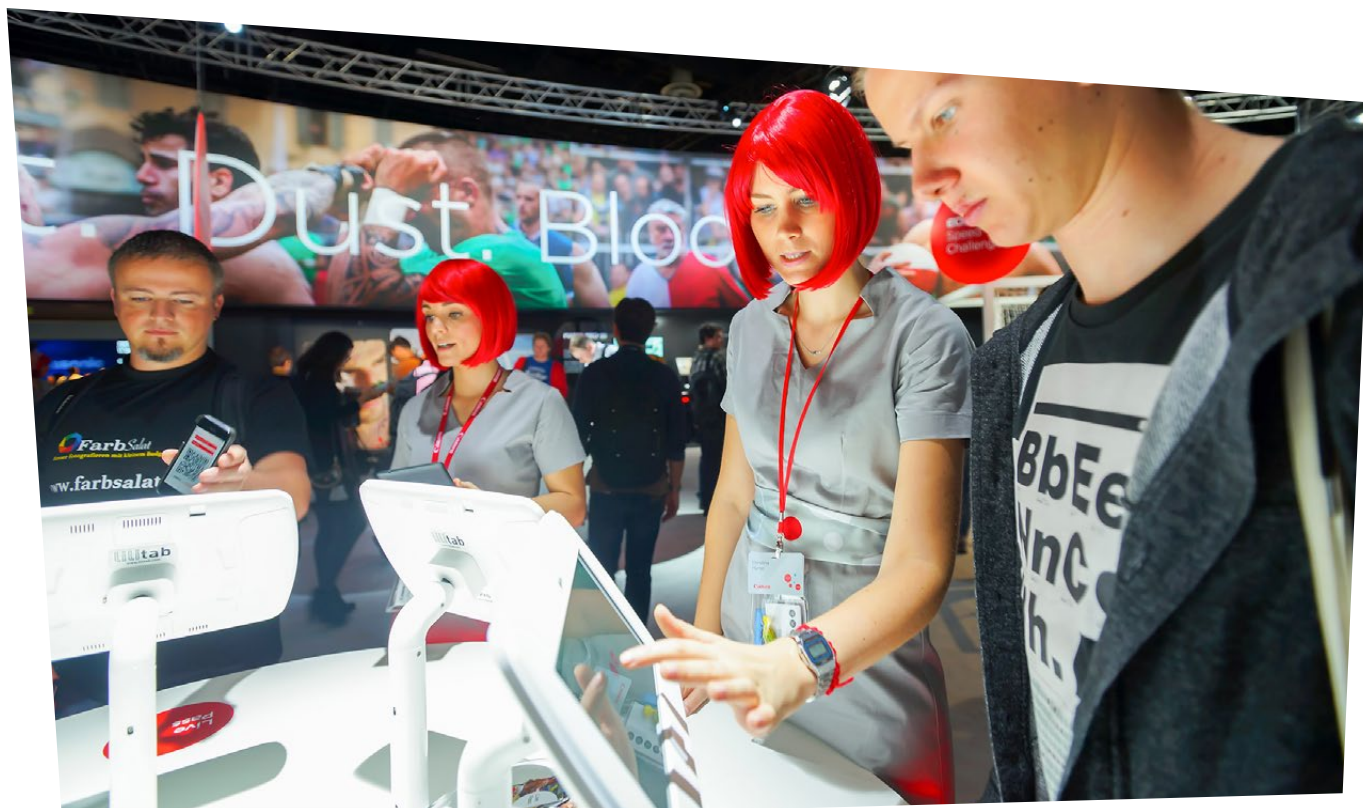
Techy Wayfinding

One of the biggest challenges with wayfinding is making sure you update it or change it to direct people to the appropriate next activity or place. So, what if your wayfinding did that all for you - changing as your day changes to feature event program information and locations? Wayfinding can be integrated into event mobile apps, or you can use adaptable digital displays. You can also use text message alerts or send notifications to attendees' mobile devices to let them know where to be and when.

Wayfinding Live!

There are some event attendees who feel more reassured when they ask a real person for help. Wayfinding ambassadors can provide assistance with directions and information and set a friendly, welcoming and approachable tone for your event. Add "Ask me" staff to key entry points and intersections of your event. Help them to stand out in the crowd by using hats, t-shirts, flags, lollipop handheld signs or colourful umbrellas. Equip them with a handheld device pre-loaded with the event mobile app so they have the information they might need at their fingertips. Live wayfinders are particularly useful when guests have to follow a complicated route.

Tip: Make sure to pick chatty and extroverted types for these roles.



Wayfinding – Get Moving

If your participants are active and mobile, consider wayfinding that incorporates a fitness component. This can be as simple as encouraging your attendees to walk to an off-site function. Tap into the current fitness craze by tracking the route. Indicate how many calories can be burned by walking to a function onto signs directing people to that location.

You can also use technology to support your efforts to keep people active using GPS wayfinding, wearable technology (i.e. fitness trackers like FitBit) and your event mobile app to track kms logged and activity levels. Make it a challenge and see just how competitive your delegates can be!

PS – Keep in mind you may need to offer an alternative (like rickshaw rides to off-site events or shuttles) for those who are less mobile or in case of inclement weather.

Wayfinding – Un Oeuvre d'art!

Artistic wayfinding elements grab everyone's attention. Use bold colours, unique textures, sculpture, visible or large scale graphics or character mascots to direct event attendees. Blackboards and chalk are a reusable wayfinding canvas and are on trend for weddings, receptions and parties.

A larger event could involve a local arts council or arts school in creating a temporary outdoor art gallery project or exhibit (think "Chalk Walk" where artists create temporary works of art on a sidewalk to promote the flow of people between disconnected venues).

Temporary graffiti walls may also be suitable for your event and a fun way to identify where to go and when.

Wayfinding – Form and Function

Wayfinding can be incorporated into furnishings (i.e. use the back of a bench or chair) in addition to signs. This can work well for an event with networking hubs, casual seating areas, and lounges.

Wayfinding au Naturel

Integrate nature into wayfinding – things like plants, sand and water can be used to direct people. Examples can include hedged pathways or carpets made of grass which naturally funnel participants certain ways, and vertical gardens/living walls or stone gardens which can incorporate directional messages. This kind of signage is particularly effective indoors, where natural objects and textures stand out.

Wayfinding – Light it Up!

Lighting is a great way to show the way! Consider lighted pathways (using flameless candles or Christmas lights along the floor) or uplights. Projection (Gobos) is often used to highlight the location of washrooms, food stations or coat checks and can also incorporate sponsor branding.

CONCLUSION

If you find yourself (and your event volunteers) spending much less time answering the question "How do I get to... Where is...?" you have been successful in executing your wayfinding plan!

Wayfinding | Check List

- ☐ Make sure any and all wayfinding signage or displays have approval by the venue or location before you purchase or install anything.
- ☐ Make your wayfinding sustainable whenever you can – choose materials that can be adapted to another event or venue or that are generic enough to be reusable. Opt for recyclable materials and avoid stickers or materials that are difficult to recycle (like foam and vinyl).
- ☐ Little bits of info work better – Laying out all your directions on one sign at the start of a journey may overwhelm participants. Parcel information out in bite-sized chunks, adding a new direction each time they complete a 'leg' of their journey.
- ☐ Use maps – but simplify them. Not everyone orients themselves North-South-East-West. Remove any unnecessary info or landmarks from floor plans or maps that could confuse people. Start with a map provided by the venue, and simplify it or adapt it to suit your event requirements.
- ☐ Use colour to colour block or theme certain areas. For example, if you have VIPs or different levels of passes or accreditation, use colour to delineate access areas.
- ☐ Use a clear font that is large and easy to read from a distance.
- ☐ Use arrows to point the way.
- ☐ Have someone test the routes beforehand to make sure the signage will get people to their destination!

Name Badges | The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

We've seen some pretty awful name badges over the years... We've seen some pretty cool ones too!

Not every event is best suited to name badges (i.e. weddings), whereas they are an absolute necessity at other types of events (i.e. conferences). If you have ever considered scrapping name badges altogether, please reconsider. It is still something that is very important to your attendees, particularly in a business environment where there is an immediate comfort level seeing one's own name (and the name of a potential new contact) clearly displayed. Name badges facilitate networking!

So, if you have decided that name badges are a 'must have' here's the low down on what you need to know.



Name Badges | Do

- ✓ Use a large and legible font for first and last name (or first name only). Small funky font styles are not well suited to name badges. Sans serif fonts are best.
- ✓ Add social media info. Twitter handles or LinkedIn info can be added to the front of the badge (lower left-hand corner is the best spot). It helps people to connect over social media beyond your event!
- ✓ Use a quality product – a flimsy name badge reflects on your organization and your event. Don't cheap out on this! Browse the internet for ideas and options.
- ✓ Take into consideration placement of the name badge. Badges that hang too low are tough to see and get in the way. Badges that sit too high look odd. Feel free to give your attendees some guidelines on how to wear their badge or offer adjustable lengths (they sit differently on a woman vs. a man).
- ✓ Support networking by using colour-coded name badges to designate certain groups of people. You can also use colour-coded lanyards, attach ribbons or stickers or assign specific graphics to certain groups. This tactic really helps networking and is another great ice breaker!
- ✓ Limit the amount of info on the name badge - name, title, affiliation and perhaps city or country can be included. To keep it simple, go with name and org/company name.
- ✓ Look into QR-Code or barcode name badges that use the latest technology that allow lots of info about the delegate to be stored and shared. If a smartphone has a QR scanner/reader guests can scan name tags as they network!
- ✓ Brand your name tags. Include your company or event logo and event colours.
- ✓ Print name badges two-sided. Why not make use of this extra real estate? You can use the back side for program info, sponsor recognition or advertisement of a special promo. You can also print the name and contact info back-to-back so if the name tag twists and turns throughout the day the most important info is still visible.

Name Badges | Don't

- ✗ Select a style of name badge that may damage clothing (no one wants to leave the event with sticker residue on their jacket or pin holes in the fabric of their nicest shirt).
- ✗ Spelling mistakes on name badges are a big no-no. Nothing annoys a delegate more than seeing his or her name misspelled (even if this is how their own name was entered on the online event registration form!). Double and triple check all name badges before the event. If you notice one that seems wrong, print an alternative. Is it Karin or Karen? Print two versions just to be safe.
- ✗ Makeshift badges are so awkward! Ensure you have a system in place onsite during your event to create name badges that look exactly like everyone else's. No one wants to walk around with a handmade name badge when everyone else has the slick glossy version.
- ✗ Forget about size and shape. Name badges that are too big get in the way and name badges that are too small are pointless. Find the size and shape that are just right for your event!
- ✗ Forget about lanyards! If you have selected a style of name badge that requires a lanyard, use this opportunity to accessorize your name badge. You can also provide visibility for a sponsor by having lanyards sponsored.

CONCLUSION

Name badges are often the last item to be checked off the event 'to do' list, but they are an important element. Preparation of name badges is a tedious task and one that is best suited to the most detail-oriented member of your event team! Also, keep in mind that event attendees detest standing in line for onsite registration or to enter the event, but you still have to find a way to distribute name badges and other event materials and officially welcome your guests.



Uh-Oh... | How to Deal with an Event Crisis

There is a reason why event planning is one of the top 10 most stressful careers! When things go wrong at an event, it is nerve-wracking. Event planners feel a lot of pressure to make things as seamless and worry-free as possible so, when disaster strikes (small or large), event managers are tasked with fixing it, handling damage control and making everything good again.

It won't be the first time or last time there is a problem at an event so you may as well accept this as part of the deal. Although it's rough when something happens under your watch, the reality is that inconvenient things will happen when you least expect them to occur.

PLANNING AHEAD

In our experience, the best way to avoid an event crisis is to consider what could possibly go wrong ahead of time and plan for it.

Yes, that's right.

Plan for the worst and then find ways to avoid, minimize, or eliminate unacceptable risks. Don't forget to keep looking for and evaluating new risks that may crop up along the way and then find ways to mitigate any adverse effects that may happen despite your best intentions.

Suggestion: Hold a brainstorming meeting with the event team to identify all the possible problems that could crop up. Then, discuss them in a calm and logical way – before they happen. When they do happen you will already feel somewhat prepared OR you may even be able to nip a few in the bud.

For bigger risks that you can't avoid, there may be ways to accept the risk. Check your

insurance policies to ensure they cover every contingency you may need (i.e. cancellation insurance, travel insurance, commercial general liability insurance, etc.).

Releases and waivers can come in handy too! And don't forget about social media-related risks. The last thing you need is someone capturing an event crisis on video/photo and it goes viral; however, you must assume that this can and will happen. Do you have someone on your team designated as your media liaison/spokesperson? Identifying someone for this role before the event and prepping ahead of time can save you time and grief in the moment as the crisis is unfolding.

Some events have a living risk-management plan. Consult with security and emergency services onsite at your venue and also collect emergency contact information for all of your speakers, attendees, and staff. Do you know if there is a defibrillator onsite? Does anyone on your team know how to use it? These are all things you need to be thinking about.

EVEN THE BEST LAID PLANS...

You know the saying. You had a rock solid plan and everything was running smoothly and then boom! A curveball comes your way.

Here's a checklist for how we suggest to weather the storm and develop some coping skills:

- If you did make a mistake, admit it to yourself, to your team/boss/client and then transition into solution mode.
- If someone else erred, you are most likely still going to be the one to fix it, so don't even bother trying to throw someone else under the bus. The blame game is a drain on your time and energy and time is not your friend when it comes to dealing with event-related disasters. They are almost always time-sensitive.
- Clear your head and put your brain to work on determining a logical solution or options. For every one problem, try to have at least two viable solutions.
- Involve the team – sometimes two heads are better than one and someone else may have a great idea.
- Don't share the drama with anyone who doesn't need to be informed – contrary to the point above, involving other people in a challenging situation may just cause more headaches and invite the drama to spread like a bad rash throughout your event.
- Be professional – at least in public. It's ok to step away alone (back to your hotel room, outside, in the bathroom or wherever) and have a mini-meltdown. But, do it alone and make it quick. This is not the time for a pity party. Pull yourself together and then get back out there. It is rarely ever productive to lose your cool in front of an audience.
- Delegate the problem – sometimes minor things can be sorted out by someone other than the event lead. If so, delegate it. It is a learning opportunity for junior staff and it leaves you free to deal with the next issue – one that may require more of your attention.
- Just do it – sometimes things just need to get done and they need to get done now, so just jump in and do what is required.

Example: *If a box of critical session materials needs to be in a specific meeting room in five minutes, pick up the box and go. Don't wait for an event volunteer to show up or even worse, don't bother calling the person on your team who was supposed to make sure the box was in the right room on time telling them of the oversight. Just do it yourself and move on.*

- Wondering when to tell the higher ups of the mishap? This can be tricky and you may have to make a judgement call. You don't want them to hear it from someone else, but you also don't want them to panic or get angry. Rule of thumb is that if it is something very important to that person tell them right away (even if you don't have an immediate solution ready to go). If it is less important, troubleshoot first and come up with some options or even better – just fix it and inform them later.
- Keep cool – your brain cannot problem solve effectively if you are panicking. Reassure yourself that you have this under control – some positive self-talk may be required!
- You cannot please everyone! Even if you fix every little thing that went wrong during the event there will always be a critic in the room. These people are the ones who just won't let it go; they complain constantly and tell everyone they meet about the issue. You cannot stop them, so don't even try.

CONCLUSION

S*it happens. Deal with it.

If you cannot manage the daily stresses of event management while simultaneously ensuring the event is running smoothly you are in the wrong field. Something will always go wrong at an event – it is an event. This is what they do. Babies cry ... it doesn't mean you are a bad parent. This is what they do!

Mistakes or problems at events do not define you. It is how you handle the crisis that sets you apart. Rise to the challenge and bring your "A" game. Good luck!

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