

SharePoint Saturday Event Planning Guide

Welcome to the SPS Events planning guide!

This notebook will take you through the different aspects of planning your own SharePoint Saturday Event. This guide will cover how to go about reaching sponsors, securing a venue, key planning points, and what to expect when the big day comes around.

The guide is a great reference, but remember there are always people out there who are willing to help as well. Don't hesitate to reach out to the SPS Events Board, or to other SPS Events organizers for ideas or if you have questions. The SPS Events Board can be reached at info@spsevents.org.

The SPS Events Executive Board



Susan Lennon



Eric Harlan



Tasha Scott

Special thanks to these gentlemen for creating the foundation for this documentation.



Brian Farnhill



Ben Walters

General Guidelines

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In order for SPS Events to continue to be successful, we ask every SPS Events organizer to adhere to the following guidelines:

- **Your SPS Event is a community event focused on the attendees** - *While Event sponsors are certainly welcome and appreciated, the focus of the event should always be on educating attendees and community building.*
- **SPS Events are always free** - *You may never charge for an event.*
- **Attendee Information is private** - *Unless an attendee opts-in to give their information to sponsors, you may not share it.*
- **SPS Events are open to the public** - *All attendees should be welcome.*
- **Be objective when selecting speakers** - *Do not be partial or biased in your selection of speakers. That said, SPS Events was founded with the intent to be a seeding ground for new speakers and practicing new sessions.*
- **Always hold it on Saturday.**
- **You must use the default SPS Events images that are given to you** - *You may personalize the logo to fit your event's local flair, but the logo itself cannot be altered and must be used.*
- **All of your event content, information, etc. must be hosted and live on the SPSEvents.org website** - *If the website is lacking any content/capability you feel you need, please reach out to the SPS Events Board directly.*
- **You will be completely responsible for all of your event's fundraising and handling of these funds** - *You and your event are ultimately responsible for the funding of said event. This includes all of the aspects of funding including gathering funds, dispersing funds as appropriate, and any legal/financial concerns that arise from these activities. You may never go negative in funds, or speculate purchases based on expected funds coming in. You must have what you spend. The SPS Events Board cannot assume any responsibility for these actions.*

Regarding Event Ownership, Timing, and Geographic Proximity

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- For new events in a city, ownership is granted on a "first come-first served" basis, with ownership granted to those individuals that first contact the SPS Events Board via email regarding their intent. Ideally, prospective event organizers will have secured a date and at least a pending venue. *Announcing an event online or via any social media will not constitute contacting the SPS Events Board and does not guarantee ownership of an event.*
- The original organizers of an SPS Event retain ownership of that event for 18 months after the last event they actively coordinated. If 18 months pass with no event in that city, the event ownership may be transferred to another interested party; however, the SPS Events Board will make a reasonable effort to contact the original host. If after 3 days that host is unreachable, or chooses to not host an event, the event will be turned over to requesting party. If the event is transferred, access to the site will be granted as-is with all existing content intact to help the success of future events.
- When selecting a date for your event, be thoughtful as to how your event and the date will affect other events around you. (Speaker/Sponsor draw, location, availability, etc.). If events are too close to each other both in time and distance, both events suffer due to lack of sponsor and attendee draw. This consideration applies not only to fellow SPS Events in your region, but other events as well.
- While there are no specific rules regarding geographic proximity of events, be cognizant of the timing as mentioned above in order to reduce competition between events. Try to space events in close geographic proximity as far apart as possible to ensure the greatest speaker, sponsor, and attendee draw.
- Date and geographic proximity will be considered by the SPS Events Board when granting event approval. These factors will be considered on a case-by-case basis depending on the events in question.

Let's get started!

To get started with planning your event, answer the following questions to generate some ideas.

- What type of SharePoint demographic(s) does your local area have? Mostly Financial? Commercial Enterprise? Federal? Military?
- When are you thinking of holding your event? Consider your audience's availability, local seasonal considerations, and venue cost/availability. Also, allow at least 10-12 weeks of planning time.
- How many people do you think will attend? A successful event can have as few as 50 or as many as 500 (or more!) attendees.
- Who will be organizing the event? Having at least 2 or 3 planners is a good idea, but having too many organizers can also be a challenge.

If you have a hard time answering some of these questions, consider these resources:

- If you are not part of the local SharePoint User Group, reach out to these people for the inside scoop on the local SharePoint scene. Chances are the local SharePoint User Group will be an excellent resource toward making the event successful.
- Reach out to non-SharePoint User Groups as well, such as your local SQL or .NET User Group.
- Create a survey for prospective attendees to determine what type of SharePoint they use, and how they use it.

Here are some links as well:

[Susan Lennon on Resources for Producing a SharePoint Saturday Event](#)

[So you want to run a SharePoint Saturday Event - Eric Harlan](#)

Finding a venue

One of the first things you **MUST** do to get started is pick an appropriate venue to hold your event. The venue should have a number of rooms that can be set up for lecture-style presentations, and preferably have a room or area big enough to fit your entire intended audience. You'll need to have an estimate of how many rooms you will need. How many rooms you will need is based on the number of attendees you believe you'll have, in addition to how many sessions you'll have going at any given time.

Once you have identified a potential venue, try to go there in person and check it out. Look for the following things:

- How many people will fit in each room?
- Where will people eat lunch (if provided)?
- Where will you fit everyone at the same time for a keynote/opening/closing remarks?
- Where will sponsors have a stand/exhibit? Can you funnel attendees through the sponsor's area in a way that will provide value to them?
- Where will you have a central table for registration and information?
- Are you allowed to bring in external catering? If not, what is the cost of food there per person?
- Is there WiFi or network access available for you, your presenters, and your attendees?
- Do the rooms have projectors?
- Does the facility provide janitorial service or A/V Service (and is there a charge?)
- Who provides liability insurance?

If there is a charge for the venue, find out how much it will be for the number of rooms you expect to need, and then include this in your event budget.

This is probably the hardest part of putting together a SPS Event. Some SPS Events are held at training centers or schools, with some venues providing use of their facilities in return for in-kind sponsorship. In larger metropolitan areas, you may have no other choice than to go with a hotel or convention center. This type of venue usually makes their money on the catering, so expect to do some negotiating. Make sure you keep the menu simple, and let them know you are representing a non-profit as they will sometimes give you a break on costs. Make sure your final price includes the necessary audio/visual setup for your speakers.

Contacting the SPS Events Board and Sponsors

Reaching out to the SPS Events Board is your next step. The SPS Events Board will confirm that there are no planned events in your area, no calendar conflicts, and if your event is approved they will create a site for it on www.spsevents.org. You can reach the SPS Events Board by emailing info@spsevents.org or going to the contact page at www.spsevents.org/contact

Your site on spsevents.org is both a collaboration space for planning your event and a publishing space for promoting your event to potential speakers, sponsors, and attendees.

Christian Buckley [@buckleyplanet](#) has some excellent advice [here](#) on finding sponsors.

There are national (and international) sponsors who are involved in some of the SPS events. The SPS Events Board can point you toward some. Another suggestion is to reach out to other SPS event hosts and ask for help. Work with your local SPUG (SharePoint User Group) to identify local sponsors, first and foremost. SharePoint Saturday is about building out the local community, so give the local product and services companies the right of first refusal. Once you have a budget estimate, you should determine your sponsorship goals – and try to stick to them. Just because you CAN raise a lot of extra funds doesn't mean you SHOULD. Try to keep that attendee-to-sponsor ratio as high as possible, raising only the funds you need, so that your sponsors get the best value possible out of your event. At the end of the day, the event should be about the great content and building your local community, not raising money. Sponsors are what make these events possible – and free for attendees. Be sure to thank them repeatedly for participating.

Hotel/Conference Center Venue*

There are a lot of pros and cons to think about when you're picking your venue- some of which require much attention to detail. Keep these tips in mind:

If you plan to host your event at a hotel:

- You will need to plan a bit further ahead to book the space
- You will be expected to sign documentation that ties the event (and you specifically) to a specific amount of revenue the hotel will be getting from the event
 - Revenue comes from an agreed upon amount of rooms you will rent
 - Food you WILL purchase
 - Space you will use
 - other various services
- There are a lot of fees and taxes associated with costs. Be sure to get an event planner assigned to you from the hotel that will give you a WRITTEN report of final cost expectations as you proceed.
- Be sure to get written in the contract that you are NOT responsible for incidentals on the rooms (room service, drinks, internet service, etc.)for any room a guest books in your name.
- Prices for some services are GROSSLY overcharged. For example: \$500 for internet access to one conference room or 600 dollars a day for a wireless router. Make sure you are not obligated to use their services in all circumstances. Doing so will help you manage costs. For example, SPSBaltimore borrowed projectors from sponsors as to not incur a \$4,500 cost for renting 6 projectors.
- Make sure you ask for any specials, complimentary items or services that come with the contract. E.g. free rooms, free snacks, or food for the event.

Hotels are extremely flexible. SharePoint Saturday Baltimore event was held at a hotel and it was negotiated that there would be no guaranteed rooms rented as the hotel originally wanted. This was met by the hotel blocking off a specific amount of rooms until a week before the event to give attendees first choice. It is important to note that you are contractually obligated to provide revenue to the hotel, so very careful planning must be made into your events budget-money that will be coming in from sponsors and food costs. **Also, most hotel contracts will provide a percentage fee structure that as you get closer to your event you are obligated to pay a percentage if you cancel. Pay close attention to this and cancel the event in enough time to not be obligated to pay money that you don't have if you don't have an event.** Please pay close attention to your negotiated contract.

Some of the good sides of having it at a hotel:

- Staff available to you to help setup, tear down and clean up
- After speaker dinner, you can simply go to your room and sleep, wake, and be in the same building as the event
- Less of a need to handle specific logistics like bringing tape, staplers, or arranging for chairs and tables etc.

The cost is sometimes worth the peace of mind that goes into some of the logistics planning.

Budget

Now that you have a venue in mind and are confirming those details you can begin to look at what money you have left over for the other things you will need.

At this point you will be receiving Sponsors forms and promises of money. **You are 100% responsible for collecting, managing, spending and reporting on those funds. SPSEvents will not be managing any events funds.**

A key point to remember is that SPS Events is an unregistered non-profit community effort.

Financial irresponsibility will not be tolerated with any SPS Event.

If you have the benefit of being near a Microsoft location and can use their facilities – and IF those facilities can support an event your size, then your costs will be dramatically less than holding it at a hotel or event center. After venue, you need to think about food (light breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack, with coffee, sodas, and water throughout the day), and some raffle items. Nice to have (but not essential to a successful event) include speaker shirts, a speaker dinner, attendee shirts, and attendee bags. These nice-to-have items really are just that – nice to have, but not essential to your success. Your goal should be to bring great content to your community. Don't worry about the frills.

Another good tip is to let the sponsor take care of costs directly when convenient. Depending on the cost it may make more sense to have a sponsor pay directly. An example would be food. If you have a lunch sponsor you have them supply the caterer with the payment after you have ordered.

Nice to Haves

Here are a few things that are traditional and add to the spirit of the event:

- **Speaker Dinner**
Many speakers come at their own expense and it is a nice gesture to hold a dinner to show your appreciation. It is also a great place to network and mingle with the SharePoint community beyond your area. Most event organizers invite sponsors and any travel companions as well. But again this depends on your budget. Generally food is covered and cash bar is the norm. But check getting a drink special while negotiating.
- **Speaker Shirts**
These are great and you may have a sponsor pay for them directly. Some events are deciding to forego shirts to save on expenses
- **SWAG and SWAG bags**
Some people love them, others don't. Either way attendees are going to be carrying around vendor SWAG and printed materials. Oddly enough these do take time to fill and coordinate very close to the event so plan for that. Use your funding wisely.
- **Raffles**
Many times sponsors may be interested in participating in the event but are not large enough for formal sponsor amounts. This is a great option for them.
- **SharePint**
An after-event happy hour for fun and networking. One of the easiest things to do while planning. Basically pick a place, reserve some space there (at a minimum, please have the courtesy to inform the venue of your plans so they can staff accordingly), try to get a food/drink special and have fun!!

General Checklist

- Pick a date for the event (make sure it doesn't coincide with other community events that are happening near your location)
- Find a venue
- Determine the size of event and plan for as much as 30% no show. However, it's a gamble to plan for more than you can hold- if everyone shows up you'll be overbooked. Play it smart- every event has had at least 20% no show.
- Determine possible track topics (see information below on how registration info can help you refine tracks)
- Contact local MS community leaders to advise them that you're planning an event (your best bet would be a Developer Evangelist)
- Create a committee to run the event (find people in other circles but choose hard workers. Make sure you can rely on them.) It might be a good idea to have backup team members in case of emergency or unforeseen events.
- Find sponsors for things such as:
 - Breakfast
 - Lunch
 - Swag
 - Speakers' Shirts
 - Speaker Social
 - Attendees' Shirts
 - Printing
- Choose a registration tool. Most have found EventBrite (www.eventbrite.com) registration to be the most helpful (another option is ClickToAttend). Try to gather as much demographic information as possible without being overbearing (user type, other interests, etc.). This information will provide guidance to your speakers and help you to refine tracks.
- Contact the SPS Events board to create your site image and your SPSEvents site
- Add event to Community Megaphone www.communitymegaphone.com (US only)
- Add event to Bamboo Solutions SharePoint Daily
- Announce event at local user groups (all MS user groups)
- Broadcast the event to everyone (Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Email, local newspaper,
- Announce "Call for Speakers" at least 10 weeks prior to event
- Announce "Registration" at least 6 weeks prior to event
- Create a schedule for the event (try to organize the session topics in a non-conflicting manner that will allow them to build off each other)
- Send out a survey to see who plans on attending what sessions (this helps to determine what rooms each session should be in or if the schedule should be shuffled to maximize session attendance)
- Create event/speaker survey and hand it out at the event (this helps to determine what worked and which speakers were most liked)
- Communicate frequently with the community (give updates on progress of event, get people excited about the event)
- Budget things out now. Identify must haves, nice to haves, and big dreams, and come up with ballpark prices for each item. Also be smart about your ordering on food and other items.
- Plan to take the Friday before off from work
- Visit the site early on to make sure things such as chairs, tables, projectors and overall lay out work.
- Get access to an extra pack or two of bathroom supplies, again some venues are not equipped to have 100s of people there during the week much less the weekends
- You'll need to make sure sponsors have tables and resources, plugs and extension cords.
- Get to the location early day of
- Will you be printing name tags?
- Make sure to add a vegetarian option at lunch if you can

- Double check each and every shirt (speaker & attendee), bag, printed materials. Not just the proofs. Try to get them at least 2 weeks in advance (had a vendor send the wrong city's shirts a day before the event)
- Have a drop off date for sponsor to send you materials, like the Thursday before the event. The Friday before will be tough for you to make special trips
- Try and meet as many sponsors in person if they have local reps
- Get to know all the speakers possible at the Speaker dinner
- Mix it up with the attendees day of, you'll know if it is a success by their reaction at lunch time

Here are some other links to check lists.

[Tips on Hosting a SharePoint Saturday Event](#) by Christian Buckley [@buckleyplanet](#)
[Confessions of a SharePoint Saturday Organizer](#) by Michael Hinckley [@sharptcontender](#)
[Organizing a SharePoint Event: What You Need To Know](#) by Mark Rackley [@mrackley](#)

Advertising the event

Once you know where and when your event will be you need to start getting the word out! Social networking tools have been invaluable at spreading the SharePoint Saturday word, so start with the following:

Get an email address for the event - just something at outlook.com will do (e.g. spsCITY@outlook.com or something like that)

Get a twitter account (e.g. @SPSCITY), and get everyone you know to follow it so your tweets will be heard
Create an event on Facebook

Once you have all of these, start tweeting, emailing, facebooking, talking, screaming and spreading the word as much as possible. These tools have done a great job at getting the word out, but there are some other things you can do as well:

Get your event mentioned at SharePoint user groups. LinkedIn has a number of such groups and is a great place to start. Get the site linked from other sites; get people to blog about the event

Make sure when you tell people about it, get excited and ask them to tell their friends!

Once the ball starts rolling it should gain a bit of momentum on its own, but don't ever forget about keeping the marketing of the event going - this is what will get your event known to sponsors, potential speakers and attendees!

A good rule of thumb is to announce the event date together with a call for speakers and sponsors. Usually the closing date on those will be your announcement that registration is open to attendees.

Planning the event as a group

One thing you will want to get right is organizing the event as a group. If there is more than one of you making this happen then getting communication right will be key. Here are some tips:

- **Choose only people you can count on to be there when the chips are down.** Lets face it, if you took the steps to make this happen, you care enough to see it through. Don't choose people for your committee if there is any doubt they won't pull through when you need them most.
- Make sure all communication to do with the event goes through a single shared email address. That way everyone will read it and know what is happening.
- Schedule regular catch ups - either in person or online and make sure everyone is communicating what they are doing
- Delegate. Let people do what they do best, it will ultimately allow things to run smoother.

10+ weeks to go

Things are very early on at this point and the event seems so far away, but seriously the next 10 weeks will fly by! Here is what you should be doing at this point:

- Get your venue confirmed - once the date is solidified let the SPS Events board know and we will have a site created for you
- Get email addresses and twitter accounts created
- Grab your sponsorship document and review the speaker submission form below to customize as needed, these will end up on your website to help get sponsors and speakers - set a public date for speaker submissions to close (aim for no later than 6 weeks to go)
- Assess what you need sponsorship for, talk to the SPS Events board to help get the standard major sponsors on board - we can also point you to some book sponsors to donate some goods for raffle prizes.
- Start spreading the word that you are looking for sponsors and speakers - use the website to host documents when you get them, and direct all enquiries to your shared email address for the planning committee to see
- Go to www.eventbrite.com or www.microsoftgroupevents.com and sign up for an account there (with the common email address) - this will create a site that you can use for attendees to register. Put the link on your site and spread the word early, people will sign up just because it's a SP Saturday, but don't expect a ton of people until after you announce your speakers in a few weeks.

8 weeks to go

By this point you should have your sponsorship confirmed (at least most of the major ones - don't feel bad if you don't though, there is still time for this) and you will more than likely be receiving speaker submissions. Try hard to resist the urge to approve people early and tell them they are accepted before your cut off date - you might get better ones later and you won't know what to do! Here are the things you should be doing at this point:

- Create a method to track your speaker submissions. A Suggestion would be a SharePoint list on your SharePoint Saturday site or a spread sheet. Add columns to rate each one and categorize them - it will help the decision making process
- **(OPTIONAL)** Start thinking about your show bags, how will they be put together, what will go in them, when will you put them together? Identify potential suppliers of what you need and confirm costs for your show bag sponsor
- **(OPTIONAL)** Find some speaker shirt vendors who can embroider the SP Saturday logo on the shirts for your sponsors to choose from - get a cost estimate and send the logo to them now - they will need time to get it converted to an appropriate format up front. Choose a shirt color (Make sure you pick a shirt color that complements the SharePoint Saturday logo) and determine if you will need to supply the shirts or if the supplier will do it for you. Get back to the shirt sponsor with an updated cost estimate. (We've used <http://www.omdembroidery.com/> many times with great success)
- If lunch is not being handled by the venue, start to think about what type of food you want to have. (Some try to stay away from the standard "pizza fest," consider other options as a nice alternative.)

6 weeks to go

At this point in the game you should be looking more closely at your speaker submissions and start thinking about making some decisions. From this point on you will need to spend more time keeping in touch with the co-organizers- so be ready for a few long phone calls to discuss this. Around this time you should be doing these things:

- Confirm your speaker list and finalize the shirt order
- Update the website with the speaker and session details (and then spread the word!)
- Start finalizing the documents below for the schedules that will be printed off and distributed all over the venue on the day!
- Plan to keep your speakers in the loop from here on, and keep a couple of potential speakers/sessions on stand by if people drop out last minute (this can and likely will happen). Regularly email them to let them know what is happening and don't be shy about telling them how they can help advertise the event
- Update your sponsors to let them know how planning is going and start letting them know what sort of things to expect on the day. Make sure they are clear on expectations and assumptions. This is very important.
- Start to figure out who/what will be your keynote presentation (if you're having one)
- Start to plan your speaker dinner

4 weeks to go

Only a month away, things are getting closer and by now you should be seeing plenty of registrations starting to come through. This will continue right up to the last week, so don't be too upset if it isn't going well right off the bat - think of ways to get the word out more if this is the case. Here is what else you should be doing at this point:

- Find out what your raffle sponsors need to buy (if you are selecting them) and arrange invoices for them to pay (See the sponsor Page regarding purchasing and money with sponsors)
- Speak with your venue to get a map and plan out how many tables you will need for sponsors (check with each one as not all of them will want this) - plan on the map of the venue where each one will go
- If you have a name badge sponsor, speak with them about name badge designs, consider adding the SharePoint Saturday logo to them
- **(Optional)** Create a PowerPoint template that has all the basic slides and sponsor logos in them, send it to your speakers to use for their slide decks, use this as another opportunity to touch base with the presenters and keep them up to date (and remember your sponsors might have sessions as well so keep them in the loop here too!)

2 weeks to go

It's almost game time! Right now you should be dotting your i's and crossing t's - spend this week communicating with your presenters and make sure everyone has everything they need for the day; same with your sponsors. Here are some things you should do this week:

- Call or email all speakers and sponsors to touch base and make sure everyone is on track for the big day. Make sure the speakers' travel schedules support the time slots you've assigned them. Solicit concurrence from each speaker to confirm that they can support the schedule you have built.
- If the venue is not taking care of your catering, place the order and get the invoice to the lunch sponsor. If it isn't being delivered make arrangements to get the food to the venue. If you are anticipating a large attendance, the logistics for food delivery can be significant.
- Start to plan the day before and the day of the event, think of things like:
 - On the day before, what will you be able to take with you and set up ahead of time?
 - What time will you be able to get into the venue both the day before and day of the event? How much set up time will you need - what needs to be done (make yourself a list)
 - What do you need to transport to the venue - will it fit in your car (100+ show bags takes a lot of space!)
 - Where can you park your car on the day? Will you need something/someone to help move boxes into the venue with you? Do you have or can you borrow some dollies?
- Confirm numbers and time with your caterer - Get them to come in at least 20 minutes before your scheduled lunch break to get everything set up
- Print off your event day surveys
 - Print your individual session surveys
 - Print your overall event survey
- Double check everything you can think of!

1 week to go

Game day is almost upon you, by this point you should be truly ready to go! There will be plenty of excitement about your event, people will be tweeting about it coming up on the weekend, and more likely than not you will be running around like a bit of a mad person trying to check everything. Here is what you should be doing in the last week:

- Confirm your schedule documents, revise the feedback forms and place an order to the printers. (Remember you will likely need 6 or so of the session feedback forms per attendee so do them in black and white unless you really have money to burn!)
- If you're planning on having a schedule "Wall"* (see below), print up the sessions - in the order they are delivered, either by room or time slot. Having them in the correct order will facilitate assembling the wall.
- **(Optional)** Get your show bags packed - this makes a nice job for the night before as it will give you and your co-organizers a chance to go over everything while you pack them. Tip: Make it a bag-packing party with your organizers and volunteers; have fun!
- If needed ensure that you pick up the name tags from where they were getting made
- Pick up/track your speaker shirts (if you haven't already)
- Make sure that you have all of your raffle prizes. Plan how you will execute the raffle and distribute SWAG.
- Print off any signs you will need for the venue (to direct people in, to rooms, to amenities, etc.)
- Get your hands onto two boxes for people to drop feedback forms into (one for session feedback and the other for the event). Label them accordingly.
- Later in the week, get your printing from wherever you got it printed (and ensure that the appropriate sponsor is charged for it)
- Confirm your schedule documents, and revise the feedback forms (below) and place an order to the printers for them. Your attendee cut off should be this week so you will have a rough idea of how many you need (remember you will likely need 6 or so of the session feedback forms per attendee so do them in black and white unless you really have money to burn!)
- Push the word through all of your marketing channels that the event is on this weekend! You may also want to consider grabbing the email addresses of your attendees and sending them a reminder email. If you use [EventBrite](#), this option is available through their interface.
- Keep an eye on the weather, and communicate the forecast to out of towners if anything nasty is coming your way.
- Also consider traffic suggestions to attendees based on local knowledge. Especially if it is tricky getting to the hotel or to the speaker dinner. Consider if most GPS instructions will take speakers/attendee's through area's of closed roads. (or even bad neighbourhoods)

*Schedule Wall:

Some have found having a "Wall" of the sessions helpful to attendees. Basically it is a prominent area of the venue with an 8 1/2 x 11 piece of paper for each session, taped in the order of the schedule; forming a large grid, usually on a wall (or large board).

Day before

- Deliver as much as possible to the venue the day before, this will decrease the amount of time you waste on simply taking supplies into your venue.
- Print off your registration spread sheets.
- Make sure the directions to your event are at the top of your SPS website (or very easy to find). This is one of the highest hit pages the day before your event
- Make sure you have Room signs and/or Directional signs printed out
- Make sure you finalize your opening slide deck and any information that will need to be presented to attendees

Speaker Dinner

- Validate everyone has the correct address and there are no more loose ends
- Go enjoy yourself, don't drink too much and try to get plenty of sleep. It's hard to resist having a good time when all your speakers are in town and will probably be enjoying themselves, but you need energy for the following day.

The big day

Saturday, April 20, 2013

12:45 PM

See the separate section dedicated to the big day...

Session Planning

Picking your speakers can be a tough rap. Its hard to reject people on any level. But when push comes to shove it has to be done.

There will always be sponsors posing as legitimate speakers, and there will always be the folks that submit one line abstracts. SharePoint Saturday is a free event but its very important we maintain a certain standard.

Here are some tips on picking your speakers and planning a schedule:

- First and foremost NEVER play favorites. Always be non-biased in your selection. Making exceptions here and there will only cause you a ton of headaches in the future. If one speaker finds out you bumped them for someone else or an ISV it'll lead to a bad reputation
 - Consider removing the names from the abstracts in order to look at them objectively.
- Gear your session picking to what potentials users have polled on your SharePoint Saturday site. Haven't put up your poll yet? Check out the section on polls.
- When you need to reject an abstract, be sure to write a meaningful email. There is nothing worse than a canned rejection email. If you need to cite the fact the areas that lacked in the abstract or that it just didn't match what the local community decided they wanted to hear about. One goal of SharePoint Saturdays is to promote new speakers.
- Just because a speaker is also employed by a vendor doesn't mean their topic will be a sales pitch. But there have been occasions where what has been submitted was 180 degrees from what was spoken about. If you are at all concerned ask the potential speaker for their deck and talking points.
- Mention it is optional for speakers to place their decks in the events template, but try to have a slide of sponsors for them all to include.
- You should always run the event the best way you see fit and how your local community works best, however keep in mind the more content you have the more spread out the attendees will be (unless you have 900 attendees). Consider working off of the mostly accepted tracks: Information Worker, Admin, Dev, Special Interest
- ALWAYS have at least 2 back up's ready in case a speaker cancels at the last minute or gets sick (it happens at just about every single SPS Event. The best and easiest is to contact a speaker that has submitted multiple abstracts and request they prepare a primary and if they wouldn't mind being a backup. It's good to stick them in the middle of the day for speaking slot. Most cancelations come from morning sessions statistically. It also wouldn't hurt if you have your own session ready to go if all else fails.

Speaker Dinner

Many speakers on the community circuit value the speaker dinner almost as much than the actual speaking engagement itself. To them it is a time to mingle with their co-evangelists, to get their name out there, or just see old friends.

Many hosts put as much planning into their speaker dinner as their actual event as well.

Now that you are 6 weeks we need to start planning .

Pick a venue

There are a few things you need to consider when really choosing a great venue for your speaker dinner

- Location
 - You'll want to choose something within 10 miles of where the majority of your speakers will be staying. You'll also want it to have a great vibe and set the stage for the speakers towards a great event.
 - Choose a location that is easy to navigate to. Five miles on all city streets is not as easy as 10 miles all highway. Remember... people from out of town
 - Are there fun things to do around the dinner location?
- Menu
 - Take into consideration vegetarian (and vegan) options. Most venues will ask you to choose from a set menu and have 2-3 choices for your guests. You'll want to pick something that will cover most of the bases. (e.g. Chicken/beef/fish and veggie)
- Cash bar vs Open Bar
 - Most of the time unless you've budgeted very well or have large cash flow you'll want to go with a cash bar. Or at least cover the first 1 or 2 drinks. Make sure you tell your guests if they are paying for their own drinks. Also make sure you clarify this with your servers. It is suggested to avoid providing alcohol due to liability. SPS Events assumes no liability
- Rush Hour
 - Its likely that half of your speakers are from out of town. For your sanity and theirs, choose a location and a time that will shield them from the worst of traffic.
- Parking
 - Valet, meters, garages. Make sure your guests know what to expect where they can park (the address of where to park)
- Cost
 - This can and probably will be a very costly option make sure you budget very closely
- Atmosphere
 - Is it a bar, is it in a private room of the bar? Is it a upper floor to a restaurant? We've found by attending many of these events that the quieter and more comfortable the atmosphere is the more your guest will enjoy their selves and hang around to mingle longer.

Checklist

Make sure you bring the speaker shirts and any other giveaways you plan to give your speakers (ex. gift cards, chocolates, thank you cards, gift bags etc...) Many have found it useful to give speakers a printed schedule and map at the speakers dinner

Make sure you set the stage for the next days events, have schedules and make sure everyone knows

when they are speaking (very important)

Say everything you need to say before people eat but after they are seated (usually right before the staff comes around to take orders.) This way you are sure to have their attention and all are in attendance.

Sponsors

VERY IMPORTANT TO READ ALL INFORMATION

SPSEvents events cannot happen without sponsors, so getting them sorted out early will be crucial to the success of your event. The best way to manage sponsors is to identify what your costs will be and then have the sponsor directly pay for them. The benefit of this is that you will never have to directly handle any cash, which is a massive bonus.

Get local sponsors on board early, try to get them involved. A big reason why an event can be successful is that local SharePoint consulting companies (including employer's) sign on early as sponsors and get directly involved, in the right way (this is important!). It might even allow you to use work time towards planning your event, have access to design resources for logos.

Also, having those local sponsors might give you access to their customer lists, which provided a very large base of potential attendees you could directly target with information about the event. Sponsors will love it because it can get their customers excited about SharePoint and gave them a chance to enhance their relationships, and it can boost your attendance numbers w/o much effort.

Sponsorships can come in the way of items or services just as much as it can be financial. Wiley/Wrox, Microsoft, and Pearson Publishing frequently donate bags, books, and stickers for giveaways. If you've got printed materials (at a minimum have a printed schedule), see if those can be donated/sponsored.

As registrations start to build, it never hurts to check back in with sponsors who were on the fence or turned you down. Having tangible numbers can help them decide that it may be worth their time

Supporting Documentation

Have a look at the attached document that outlines sponsor packages. This section explains how the standard sponsorship model works and has examples of packages. Feel free to change these to cover your own specific needs as required. If you are not sure about something regarding sponsors please ask one of the committee members.

Once the document is finalized, start circulating it! Get it to as many potential sponsors as possible and try to work on a first come / first serve basis. We have a number of contacts with potential sponsors that we have dealt with for previous events. We suggest you allow us to start with the standard sponsors for you. From there, you can further circulate the document to cover any costs that aren't covered by the usual suspects. This will assist in getting sponsorship confirmation sooner, which will allow you to focus on other things.

Sponsor Packages

Here are some possible ideas for sponsor-able items for your event. The items highlighted in **Green** are the items that almost every SPSEvent host has provided in the past. **Blue** are somewhat supported and **Red** are rare but can still be done. Each even is unique and your sponsorships will determine what you can provide.

There used to be sponsorship packages that were listed in the information that went out to companies. We've found that sectioning off sponsorship packages in levels (rather than specific items) saves a lot of time, frustration and confusion.

That said, an alternate sponsorship guide (legacy version) is also available in your packet that can be distributed to potential sponsors. Ultimately it is the host's decision on which method to use. If you are more comfortable raising the funding based on levels and allocating specific funding where you need it most (i.e. most funding to speaker dinner/event lunch over mid-day snacks) it will be easier to manage.

NOTE: Tailor your event's sponsorship guide specifically for your event. The SPS Events board have provided some examples below as well as some attached documents. Please customize them with the information you find most relevant to how you would like to approach sponsorship.

■ Lunch Sponsor

- Lunch for the actual event, estimate 75- 80% of your attendance
- Lunch includes lunch food, drinks, utensils, napkins, cups and paper plates
- Will the Sponsor be responsible for arranging and paying for the lunch
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] staff will coordinate with the logistics

■ Breakfast Sponsor

- Breakfast for the actual event,-estimate 75- 80% of your attendance
- Breakfast includes breakfast food, coffee and other beverages
- Will the Sponsor be responsible for arranging and paying for the Breakfast
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] staff will coordinate with the logistics

■ Speaker Dinner Social Sponsor

- Speakers and staff might have a dinner social the night before the event
- Sponsor may join the dinner social
- Will the Sponsor be responsible for paying for the dinner
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] staff will coordinate with the logistics
- See more on Speaker Dinner

■ Speaker Shirts Sponsor

- Shirts for the speakers (various sizes - need to obtain via speaker submission form. Experience has shown that it may be a good idea to order a few extra. Large and Extra-large seem to be the most requested sizes.)
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] and sponsor's logo embedded on the shirts
- Speaker shirts should be available the day before the event
- Will Sponsor will be responsible for ordering and paying for the speaker shirts
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] staff will coordinate with the logistics

■ Bags Sponsor

- Bags good for expected number of attendees to be distributed during the event
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] and sponsor's logo can be printed on the bag

- Will the Sponsor be responsible for arranging and paying for the bags, etc.
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] staff will coordinate with the logistics

■ Office Supplies Sponsor

- Pens and pads good for 75-80% of the people registered
- Other related needs such as printing, photocopying, program schedule, event evaluation form production, etc.
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] and sponsor's logo can be printed on custom pads
- Will the Sponsor be responsible for paying for the ordering and paying for the pens and pads
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] staff will coordinate with the logistics for everything else

■ Attendee Shirts Sponsor

- T-Shirts for attendees (various sizes)
- T-Shirts will be distributed from the sponsor's booth
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] and sponsor's logo embedded on the T-Shirts
- Will Sponsor will be responsible for ordering and paying for the attendees' shirts
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] staff will coordinate with the logistics

■ Drinks and Afternoon Snacks Sponsor

- Drinks and snacks for the actual event, estimate 75- 80% of your attendance
- Drinks should include bottled water and soda
- Snacks can be chips, cookies, etc.
- Will the Sponsor be responsible for arranging and paying for the drinks and snacks
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] staff will coordinate with the logistics

■ Raffle Sponsor

- There will be a raffle at the end of the event
- Raffle item should be items such as: MP3 player, laptop, hard drive, gift certificates, etc.
- Sponsor will be responsible for ordering and paying for the raffle item
- SPS [EVENT TITLE] staff will coordinate with the logistics
- Product or Service Raffle Sponsor

Sponsor Money

You are 100% responsible for raising, managing, spending and reporting on the funding you raise. In the future as SPSEvents stabilizes we may go back to a Non Profit status where we will have an accountant manage funding. Until then we will not be handling any funding what so ever.

It is very important to keep close track of your funds. You personally will be responsible for any overages. Also please note that if you enter into agreements with Sponsors and supply them with 1099s this will be your tax responsibility.

Sponsor FAQ's

Do I get a list of all the attendees who attend the event?

No, we will only provide attendee information for those who have specifically granted permission

Does our company get a table if we sponsor the SharePoint Saturday event?

Each event decides what level of sponsors receive which benefits

More to come...

Before people arrive

This big day is here at last - start calm and you'll get through this fine. Here is a checklist of what to do before people arrive (this can also be done the day before if you have access to the venue)

- Put up any signs that need to go up
- Arrange name tags at your reception desk in alphabetical order (Optional: some have found it a waste of time to pre-print tags given high percentage of no-shows)
- Store your show bags near the reception desk (if you have them)
- Grab spare copies of which session is at what room and have them at reception - people will lose theirs but also keep a copy to use as your own "run sheet"
- Keep a box of pens left over from the show bags (or other pens if you ran out) at the front desk for the same reason
- Make sure the coffee supplies are good to go. A complaint we see often is lack of coffee.
- Some have found having a "Wall" of the sessions helpful to attendees. Basically it is a prominent area of the venue with an 8 1/2 x 11 piece of paper for each session, taped in the order of the schedule; forming a large grid, usually on a wall (or large board).
- Try to have a bottle of water for each session in each room (i.e. 1 bottle per speaker)

Before opening session

At this point people are starting to come in, here is what you need to do:

- Always, always have someone at the reception desk. The more, the better. You don't want registration to be a bottleneck or choke point. You want the day to start off with a good experience.
- As people arrive, instruct them to grab their name tag and a show bag and ask them to hang out in your common area until the first session starts. Direct them to the breakfast or sponsors area.
- As your presenters come in, give them their speaker shirts and ensure they have anything they need (especially the ones early in the roster). Suggest your first speakers get to their rooms and get prepared (hooked to the projectors, etc).
- When the time comes, get someone who has a big voice to start directing everyone into the room for your keynote or opening sessions

During sessions

- Try to have someone (organizers or volunteers) visit each room prior to the beginning of each session to make sure the speaker has everything they need
- Try to have someone go around to each session and snap a picture or two
- If possible have volunteers available to give the speakers the 10 min's left sign

After first sessions

All morning you will find people are still coming in, so try your best to keep at least one person at the reception desk until lunch time.

Before lunch

As an idea, if you can get someone to go out and bring you some lunch to have during the session before your lunch break is scheduled, then do it - it will mean you are free to run around and talk to people at lunch time as well as take care of anything that needs to be done.

At this point though your caterers (if you have them) should be setting lunch up, give them a hand, and as people come out of their sessions make sure you send them towards the food!

If you can manage it, setup lunch for the speakers in the speaker room.

After lunch

All the really hard parts are done now, and you can start to relax a little! Give the caterers a hand cleaning up the lunch area and then sit down and relax for a chat with whoever is around (this is a great chance to talk to the sponsors who were exhibiting during the day and catch up with them), you have earned the break by this point!

Make sure the lunch clean-up has been done and any trash was removed.

Before closing session

- Before your closing and/or raffle give away, make sure you have all your raffle prizes in one place ready to go.
- Ensure that your feedback form boxes are ready to be moved to wherever you will do this part of the day (either to one of your rooms that will fit everyone or in the common area if not electronic via website). The day is almost over, time to thank everyone and give away some free stuff!
- **Make sure you do any announcements, thank yous or presentations BEFORE giving away raffle items.**

MAKE SURE TO THANK EVERYONE. THIS INCLUDES Organizers, Volunteer, Speakers, Sponsors and especially Attendees!

After closing session

It's over, you made it through and the event has hopefully gone off according to plan! Before you run off to have a few beverages with everyone, here are some things you should do:

- Do a quick clean up of the rooms to make sure no one left anything behind
- Be sure to take anything back to your car that you brought in, including left over show bags
- Assign each volunteer to a room. You want to make sure it is nicer than what you found it. You never know, you might want to do another event in the future.

Now go, relax and enjoy the celebrations! You have earned it!

Feedback and follow up

Now that the event is done, there are just a couple of things left to do:

- Collate and go through the feedback forms, collecting the data in a SharePoint list or in a spreadsheet (If not electronic via the website)
- Send emails to your presenters to provide them with the feedback (provide a high level summary of everyone's feedback scores to everyone, and then give the full scores and comments to each individual)
- Send a last follow up email to the sponsors thanking them for the input, ensure that all invoices have been paid by them as well if any were left over
- **Mandatory:** Make sure you compile and finalize all the users who have opted in for communications by the sponsors. Get this list out to the appropriate sponsors as soon as possible
- Put photos and video up on the web and then let everyone know about it
- Collect and post speakers' materials and then inform attendees
- Think about what lessons you've learned that you didn't find in this guide and send them to us.
- Make sure you document your own lessons learned so you have them for next time.

Now you can relax and do it all again in 6-12 months time!

Books

Manning Publications Co.

Please contact Candace Gillhoolley at [Candace M. Gillhoolley](mailto:Candace.M.Gilhoolley) to inquire about raffle prizes.

McGraw-Hill

Please contact Bettina Faltermeier at Bettina_faltermeier@mcgraw-hill.com to inquire about raffle prizes. Please visit www.mhprofessional.com and enter promo code SharePoint to receive 30% off our latest SharePoint books.

Pearson Education

O'Reilly

Raffle Best Practices

It is a Best Practice to let speakers know that they are included or excluded from end of day raffles.

A non required alternative is to have a Speaker's raffle done apart from the event, i.e. the Speaker's Dinner.