

HOW TO FILL A WORKSHOP

By Karin van Maanen,
yoga and mindfulness teacher

1. Know your USPs (Unique Selling Points)

In all your marketing communications, point out what is special about the workshop or event you are offering. Be clear about what people are likely to enjoy or benefit from, what they might take away with them afterwards, what is unique about the opportunity / content / venue / facilitator you are offering. Include quotes from previous participants / clients. Be honest and ethical, and don't make unrealistic promises (see point 9).

2. Be an early bird (and offer early bird discounts)

Start marketing approximately 12 weeks before an event, especially if it is in the run-up to Christmas, early in the new year, in the summer holidays, or on a bank holiday weekend. The sooner you send out your first message the better. Make it attractive for people to book early by offering a significant early bird booking discount – for instance, 20%. Then keep reminding people about what you're offering (see point 5).

3. Mix your communication methods

Your first marketing message might be a mention in your regular newsletter, an email (using MailChimp or Constant Contact is good as you can make it look a lot more interesting), a mention on your website, a social media media post or a leaflet distributed to strategic places. In it, emphasise the early bird offer. Use different communication methods to reach people at different times, so they are reminded of what you are offering. Remind them of the early bird booking deadline approaching. If you're lucky bookings will come in quickly from your early bird offer. If you don't get a lot of response yet, you know you'll have more work to do. But don't despair. Some people leave it late as they want to keep their options open, especially in the summer months.

4. Have a sales pitch

If you have the opportunity, tell people in person about what you are organising (practice a 2 min sales pitch about your event, if you are not a natural at this). Know what you will say and express enthusiasm. Tell friends, colleagues, family, anyone who could potentially come along or pass on the message (see 10).

5. Repeat strategically – remind, but don't irritate

Remind potential bookers of your event every 2-3 weeks or so, and use different ways to communicate, so they will see it in different places at different times. Use social media,

email, and include again in monthly newsletter. Post a relevant image, article or video here and there with a reminder of your event. Don't contact people TOO often and do not use too much repetition in what you put out there, because then you risk people unsubscribing or unfollowing you (for example, don't email people weekly about the same event with the same email. That just looks desperate and is annoying).

6. Evoke Fear Of Missing Out (but be honest)

If you only have a few places left, say this in your marketing: "there are only x places left for this workshop." This will call people to book as soon as they see it. Be honest about this – if after claiming you only had a few places left on your event you then have to cancel because of a lack of interest, you'll look bad. However, you could say something like: "This event is likely to book up quickly because this is the only opportunity this year to ... (fill in the gap)."

7. Lowering the barriers / help people to know what to expect

Consider whether some people would experience barriers to attending. For example, what you are offering is unusual and not many people have heard of it. It might seem scary. Or the general public may easily get the wrong idea about what you are offering. For example, for many people, yoga is only for slim, flexible women, or aerial yoga is dangerous. Do your best to describe your event well, explain what will happen, and if there are no prior experience requirements, say so. Use inclusive imagery which represents your potential bookers. Where possible signpost people to online videos which might explain the process more clearly. This lowers any barriers to participation.

8. Attract the right people

The previous point will also help you reduce the chances of people buying into something they are not actually clear about or ready for, turning up and not liking it, or not being able to fully participate and asking for their money back. If your event is going to be physically or emotionally challenging, or requires previous experience, make sure you clarify this in your communications. Ask people to contact you before booking if they have any issues or concerns. If you're not sure about a potential participant taking part, ask your professional network for advice. If it is important for your event to have a fairly equal balance between male and female participants, but you have mainly bookings from one of the sexes, you may wish to offer some reduced price or free places to people you know to balance things out.

9. Trust what you are offering

With these safeguards in place, you can trust that the majority of people who come along will get the benefits of what you are offering. Your own conviction will help you sell it.

10. Ask for help

Ask friends or colleagues personally to share your event on social media or forward emails to friends. Share your event in social media discussion groups you are a member of. Offer something in return, if you can (I'll share your event if you'll share mine)

11. Make it as easy as possible for people to get to your workshop

If possible, use an accessible venue in terms of transport links, and say that in your marketing (i.e. one hour from London, 10 mins from station, etc). If it is more difficult to access, but very unique, in a beautiful building or place, then also emphasise this and provide travel information to make it seem as easy to get to as possible.

12. Pricing

The early bird discount should be the minimum price that you can afford to run the session at. The normal price is extra. You can always extend your early bird deadline. You may wish to offer a reduced price for those who would genuinely not be able to afford your full price. Decide how many reduced places you can offer and at what price. Advertise this. It is best to charge something and request payment in advance; it helps you plan and means people value your event more and are more likely to turn up.

13. Keep in touch

As soon as people book, confirm their booking with a thank you, venue details, directions and anything else that might help them plan their travel and attendance. A week or so before the event, send an email with a reminder and request to be on time, come well rested, and listing anything they need to bring, including food. If relevant, ask them to let you know of any emotional / physical difficulties. If you are offering something potentially challenging, then you may wish to emphasise that people can take time out on the day and will be supported. This is often when you will get one or two cancellations, so keep a waiting list and get ready to fill those places, or offer reduced price or free places to friends.

14. Be a welcoming host

If you have a lot of people attending you don't know, invite people to arrive 20 to 30 mins early on workshop day. Make it clear that this is so there is time for informal meet / greet / coffee beforehand. This makes for an excellent informal ice breaker. If the lead facilitator is unable to be there for that, make sure that someone is there to chat to people, show them where everything is and make them feel at ease.

15. Get feedback and comments/photos for future marketing

You may wish to invite feedback on the day, face to face, in evaluation forms or in another creative way (for example stick a post-it with one word or sentence on the wall).

Remember, people are more likely to be honest if they can be anonymous, but a lot of people don't like forms and forms take up time. It can work well to email participants an online evaluation request which saves valuable workshop time – for example, a SurveyMonkey questionnaire – soon after the event. You won't get everyone to respond, but it enables you to ask a few more questions which can be a quick click to answer and it can be 100% anonymous. You could use an incentive for people to fill it in, for example a discount for their next booking. You can also ask for permission to use any positive feedback for future marketing, especially if you want to use people's names (which always looks more convincing). If you take photos at the event, ensure to ask permission first, so

that people can opt out, and make clear where these photos could be used. You still need consent if their face is blurred out as they could still be recognisable. For anyone under 18, you need parents' written consent. For vulnerable adults who may not understand what it means to give consent, you need a parent's or legal guardian's consent.

16. Follow up

The day after the workshop, send an email to everyone thanking them for coming. Include some pithy reminders of takeaways or intentions that were set on the day – for example, commitment to practising something new. Include any information, photos or notes from the day that you can share. Include some links to future opportunities you may be offering, which you have hopefully mentioned to them in person at the end of your event. If the workshop was challenging, say that if anything major was triggered for participants or they have questions, to not hesitate to get in touch. If anyone seemed vulnerable check in with them specifically, in person, if you see them soon enough, or via email if you don't. If necessary, you can signpost them to further support.

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