



**Attitudes,
expectations and
experiences are a key
to effective events.**

This chapter is about collecting data. The more, the merrier. Find out how information about the past can help you improve your company's future, and why it is important to know if your company is perceived as conservative, high-end or cutting-edge.

And why sometimes it can be helpful to get the managing director to shake hundreds of hands and give the drumming a rest.

"Ninety percent men, between 35 and 60 years old" or "all ages, from young to old, kids adults, senior citizens, all included". These are some typical target audience descriptions for events. The first group sounds like the audience at a business-to-business event in the automotive or finance industry, the second more like the crowd at a public event, like an open-door day.

Event managers usually have a vague concept of their potential guests, outlined by factors such as number, age, gender and a few general estimations. If they're lucky, they have some indicators of function, hierarchical levels and, ideally, income and budgetary responsibility.

On the basis of vague descriptions such as these, event managers plan their events and try to find suitable baits for their guests. With such flimsy information, it's almost impossible to devise fitting, tailored concepts. While quantitative factors are no doubt important, the key to success is a qualitative profile of your guests.

The AE² formula

This is where three factors come into play. Three decisive points that I have summarized as a formula: attitude, experience and expectation. Think of it as the mental 'formatting' with which guests approach events. The predisposition or mental starting-point that each individual takes with them to a function.



More useful than the classic target group description:
Knowledge of the AE² formula.

ATTITUDE

The 'A' stands for the attitude each guest has towards the host, the company, its brand, products and services. Is this attitude generally positive, negative or indifferent? How does the guest perceive the invitation? What are their overriding feelings about it? Gladness, skepticism, distrust, indifference? What are the reasons for these attitudes? Were these attitudes shaped by any particular occurrences or experiences in the past? And should the planned event aim to change or reinforce them? The answer to the last question will likely be 'yes'. And that again brings us to a crucial threshold for devising events.

Here's an example: Imagine a special event to introduce a line of products – technical tools, let us say – to new clients. Your market research department has informed you that 60 percent of the potential buyers perceive your company as distant and arrogant. An image that you surely want to correct. And what would be more convincing than if they personally experienced the opposite? So, for your event, you decide to position members of the management board at the entrance, where they can take the opportunity to greet each guest personally with a handshake and help them with their coats. They could even offer them a drink, and introduce them to their relevant contact person from the relevant department. Such a friendly and attentive greeting will certainly help to change the guests' perception of the company.

If your company has a reputation for efficiency, you should certainly reflect and showcase that strength in the handling of your event: make sure guest commitments are immediately confirmed, deliver tickets promptly, issue clear directions, and so on.

Is your company regarded as traditional or conservative? Then the events team should confirm with management whether this image should be strengthened or diluted.

If you only have a quantitative target group description to go on, as is common in the event business, you cannot take conceptual approaches like these. If you are not aware of the attitudes of your guests, you obviously can not address them.