

How to Organize a SUCCESSFUL Charity Motorcycle Run or Event

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A motorcycle run is a great way to raise awareness for your charity. Organizing a motorcycle event is easy. Organizing a SUCCESSFUL motorcycle event is not. It requires a large amount of planning, dedication, organization, and building community involvement & awareness. Following are valuable tips for planning this type of event. The information here has been collected from several major event organizers who have been doing it successfully for many years. These tips on how to organize a motorcycle event are just that; tips. You should always consult with the authorities and your legal advisor in your planning efforts.

Pick a Non-conflicting Date:

There is no doubt that Mother Nature can make or break the attendance at your event. But picking a date that already has several motorcycle events going on can also spell disaster. It is almost impossible to pick a day where there are no events planned in your area but you should look at Motorcycle Event Calendars from previous years and avoid any days which are already taken by long established motorcycle events which take place every year. You should also attend your local AMA (American Motorcycle Association) District Planning meeting. This will help you get an idea on what major events are already on the calendar for the year. Don't be surprised if you do not get a huge crowd at your first event. Many of the major motorcycle events started out with only 10 or 20 but then grew to hundreds or thousands after several years!

Organize a Planning Committee:

Appoint people to different positions (suggestions include: Director, Operations Chair, Sponsors Chair, Prizes/Gifts Chair, Volunteers Chair, etc.). Bikers who have been on a several runs are helpful to have on your committee as they can share ideas on activities and fun games to play that will make your run entertaining for the participants. Anyone can throw a motorcycle run, but it takes quite a few people to make the event run smoothly and successfully. Don't be afraid to recruit friends, relatives and co-workers to help you support the cause! Be careful of having "too many cooks in the kitchen". It is great to have many volunteers but you really only want one (or maybe two) leads making the final decisions and calling the shots. Make this known ahead of time so there are no surprises or misunderstanding among your committee members.

Choose the Type of Motorcycle Event:

There are many different types of motorcycle events that you can have. In general, the more variety and the more things that you have to keep different types of people occupied and happy, the more successful your event will be AND the more money you will make for your charity. Traditional poker runs are fun but you will attract more people to your event if you also throw in things like live music, vendors, emcee announcements, motorcycle & car show, stunt riders, celebrity guests, tattoo contest, Chinese auction, 50/50 split, motorcycle rodeo/games etc. You can have a Poker Run with 5 stops (more on that below), a basic run with a couple stops or a run with no stops at all.

Set Your Ticket/Admission Price or Other Fundraising Options:

There is a fine line between making as much as you possibly can for your charity AND making sure your event is enjoyable so people return year after year. Only the large established events can get away with charging a large up-front registration cost with little or nothing included. You are better off charging a small and reasonable registration donation. Most people will then feel much more comfortable donating their hard-earned money towards other things at your event like Chinese raffles, 50/50 split etc. It is also good idea to sell pre-registration tickets in the months leading up to your event at a reduced price. This way participants will be happy they are saving some money and you are guaranteed some ticket sales regardless of the event day weather.

Market Your Event:

Print up hundreds of flyers at least six months prior to your event and have volunteers pass them out at motorcycle events prior to yours. Get your event listed with online and hard-copy (motorcycle-related and non) publications and web-sites, locally and nationally. Most local newspapers and TV/radio stations will advertise charity events for free! Media exposure before AND after your event is a great way bring in the crowds. Take plenty of photos & video of the event and post them to your event's web site and social media pages. Running a slideshow of your best shots on a large screen behind the band is a great way to keep people entertained as well. Everyone loves to see themselves on the big screen! Allow supporters, community members and special guests at least a few months notification of the event. Encourage family, friends and co-workers to attend. Create a press release and send to the media.

Contact Local Motorcycle Organizations:

Join your local ABATE (American Bikers Aimed Towards Education), AMA (American Motorcycle Association) and go to their meetings. This is an excellent way to spread the word about your event and also recruit possible volunteers and participants. Make sure you also get the word out to all the local motorcycle shops, bars, restaurants and related riding clubs like HOG (Harley Owners Group) etc.

Get Corporate Sponsors and Vendors:

The more money you get from sponsors, the more money you will be able to raise for your charity! This is where you have to network, call your friends and family and bang on some doors. Send a letter or visit potential sponsors and vendors asking for donations of food and beverages. Some sponsors may also be willing to donate prizes for your raffles. You can advertise for your sponsors by listing them on you event flyers, banners, program, t-shirts etc. You can also thank them during announcements during your event. Make sure you order signs to promote your sponsors at the event.

Provide Registration & Waiver Form at Check-in:

Define the contribution required, have an arm band they pick up at the event to show they are registered. You could even have shirts, pins or buttons made up for all the participants. This is a great way to keep your event on everyone's mind for next year too! Clarify that they must sign an injury/accident disclaimer/waiver to participate. Consult with an insurance agent for a liability policy and an attorney to draw up an event release of liability form for all participants to sign at registration. It is important to note that each rider will be liable if involved in an accident. You can also find some examples on the Internet or work with your local ABATE and AMA for some ideas.

Create An Event Program and/or Run Route:

This will give the participants an event schedule with start and end points, friendly places to stop along the way, sponsors, map of the course, any contests, etc. at the finishing point. For a single day motorcycle run, between 50 and 75 miles is a good length. Choose a scenic stretch of well-paved road with as little traffic as possible that offers cell phone coverage, emergency help, gas stations and food and water. After the route has been mapped out, test at least once before the day of the run to check road conditions. If your run will be leaving in one large group, make sure you contact all the local law enforcement agencies weeks in advance to see if they would be willing to provide you with a police escort and blockers for your run.

Setup Your Stops and End-point:

This could be restaurants or bars or whatever works best. Most facilities will want you to give them an approximate head-count so they can plan their staffing accordingly. If they do not already have them, make sure the end-point facility applies for any and all special permits (alcohol, music, etc.) at least 60 days prior to the event. For outdoors events, your attendees should be able to roam around your event freely with drinks in-hand. This includes the areas where you have your bike show, vendors and band stage. Trust me, separating your beer tent from the rest of the activities does not work. It has been proven. The beer tent will be crowded but elsewhere will be a ghost town. You WILL get complaints from your vendors, the band and participants. Do it the right way, get your permits, and everyone will be happy. Although you do want to have some tables and chairs available, try to avoid the dreaded energy-zapping "wedding/banquet" type setup. This usually leads to everyone just sitting around bored and it also can but a damper on dance floor activity.

Plan for The Weather:

Rain or cold weather can cut you attendance down by more than half but proper planning will keep your attendees happy and increase the chances of them coming back next year AND spreading the word. Weather is obviously very unpredictable but you should still keep an eye on it during the days leading up to your event to get an idea of what you will have to prepare for. A large party tent will keep your guests dry on a rainy day and can also provide cool shade on a scorching summer day. Work with party supply rental companies ahead of time to see if they will be willing to donate or discount the tent(s) and tables & chairs rental in exchange for listing them as a sponsor for your event. For best results, you will need to make last minute changes and preparation based on the weather on the event day. For example, let's say the weather forecast the night before called for rain and you setup the band and vendors inside. Then the sun comes out on the morning of the event and rain has been removed from the forecast. If you don't do anything, the band and your vendors inside will most likely be entertaining tumble weeds. Bikers love the sun and they also enjoy walking around outside with a cold one, checking out everyone else's bikes and listening to music. You have to be prepared and properly staffed with volunteers to make these potential last minute changes go smoothly.

Food and Drink For Your Event:

This can vary depending on whether it is being provided by your end-point facility or if you are getting it catered. Work with the facility ahead of time and come to an agreement that works best for everyone. Most facilities do not mind donating (or discounting) some or all of the food as long as they know they will make their money from the bar. If the facility will permit, you should also see if you can work with local restaurants, pizzerias, beer distributors to see if they would be willing to donate (or provide discounts) in return for advertising them as a sponsor. Keep it simple. Most bikers are quite happy with barbeque chicken/pork, burgers, hot dogs, side salads etc. For drinks you should offer water, soda/pop, beer canned and/or draft, and some alternatives for the folks that don't like beer. A full bar isn't a requirement but if the facility has one, it would be a plus. Make sure you keep your drink prices reasonable! If people come to your charity event and feel like they are getting overcharged, the less likely they will be to open up their wallets for your raffles. If you are expecting a large turn-out, you should also have the facility setup a few drink stations to avoid long waiting lines.

Motorcycle/Car Show & Contests:

A motorcycle and/or car show is a great way to attract more people to your event. Providing trophies/plaques or cash prizes for "best of" type categories is an excellent way to get people excited about coming to your event as well. This is a great chance for vehicle owners to show off their stuff AND give the crowd something cool to look at when they are not watching the band or involved in other activities. You can also have tattoo contests and other fun options like longest pony-tail, biggest beer belly, longest beard, longest traveled, etc. etc. Use your imagination and keep things high-energy!

Raffles:

We won't go over all the intricate details for this because most of the information is readily available and based on common sense. But here are some tips which should make things go a little smoother for you. It is best to have a "you do not need to be present to win" policy for your Chinese raffles and major prizes. This will encourage greater participation in your raffles and more money for your charity. Don't bore your guests with lengthy raffle announcements which go on forever. Post the winning numbers on a large board centrally located where all can see. Let everyone know where it is a few times, but keep your announcements short and sweet. Also post information on when/where prizes can be picked up for those not present.

Secure an Emcee and/or Live band:

Contact well-known music groups, emcees or deejays that may be interested in participating in your event. Determine whether they'll participate at no charge or a reduced rate. This would also be a great opportunity for a not so well know band to get some great exposure. Check them out ahead of time by going to one of their gigs to make sure they put on a good show. You want an energetic band that entertains the crowd and gets people on the dance floor. If you can afford it, the best combination is a live band and an emcee to make announcements and keep the crowd entertained during band breaks. Although blues and southern rock bands seem to be the staple at most biker events, don't be afraid to mix it up a little bit with bands that also play a variety of heavy metal and newer rock & country songs. Historically, bands that play mostly cover songs are a much better choice than bands that play strictly original songs. Unless the original band is VERY well know of course.

Have Logistics Coordinators and Stay Organized & Informed:

There is nothing worse than a disorganized event. Make sure you have people at all points that are all connected to each other. Use walkie-talkies or cell phones who can handle emergencies, questions, etc. Have coordinators at the start and finish to help volunteers and attendees with questions, coordinate setup and cleanup, etc. Plan details for the event's agenda from start to finish. Instruct people on what they should do when they arrive, what activities might take place during the run (poker run, scavenger hunt) and after the run (auctions, raffles, shirt sales, etc.) Be sure to include games and prizes (donated) etc. All volunteers should also have copies of your guest list if you will be admitting anyone in free. Determine if you have a need to collect money at your event. Be prepared with receipts and change if necessary.

Common Rules for a Poker Run:

You do not have to do a Poker style Run but if you do, here are some common rules. At registration, riders will receive a participation coupon (to be stamped at each stop) and map to the first stop. Participants must go to all five stops on the poker run course before a deadline. At each stop, the participant hands an official the coupon for stamping then draws a poker card from a bag. To ensure fairness, always draw from a full deck of 52 cards. In the event that someone draws a card they already have in their hand, draw a new card. An official will mark the coupon with the rank and suit of the card drawn at that stop. Once the coupon is marked, riders receive a map to the next stop and continue. When all five stops are completed for each participant, you can allow an option to buy up to two bonus cards at the check-in station. Have the judges score the cards and declare winners. Poker hands are scored using standard poker hand rankings as follows: Royal flush, straight flush, four of a kind, full house, flush, straight, three of a kind, two pair, one pair, high card.

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