

EVENT STAFFING EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS

They may be the temporary face of your brand, but their impact is long-lasting. In this month's Event Staffing Executive Profile, we sit down with Hedy Popson, President at Productions Plus, to find out how the role of event staffer has evolved, and what brands need to know to keep pace.

EVENT MARKETER: *Finish this statement. Brand ambassadors are _____.*

HEDY POPSON: The face of your brand. A professional brand ambassador/product specialist helps bring your brand to life through engaging conversation and product knowledge. These trained individuals have many years of experience working consumer facing events. The goal of Productions Plus is for anyone hired from our agency ultimately to serve as an extension of your brand.

EM: *How has the role of the brand ambassador evolved over the last five years?*

HP: Brand ambassadors are no longer just a "pretty face." Research shows these individuals act as stewards of the brand and products and a well-trained BA can be an important influencer at your event or trade show.

EM: *What's trending in event staffing?*

HP: Social moments - brands are utilizing events to not only make an impression on consumers, but one that is meaningful enough that those consumers will be inclined to share it.

EM: *What's new at your company?*

HP: Productions Plus recently added an office in Plano, TX to better support our automotive sector. We've also added more FTE to focus on recruitment and event management. We now have over 70 employees dedicated to turnkey management, which can include recruitment, training, custom wardrobe, onsite support and post event reporting.



HEDY POPSON

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EM: *How are you updating how you train your staff?*

HP: One of our differentiators is the emphasis that we put on training our talent. We have a Director of Training and a group of professional facilitators who have worked with us to develop core training programs such as STARS – Sales Training for Achieving Retail Success. We also utilize technology as a means of ongoing training with internal portals and website e-learnings. Our agency has produced our own webinars and training modules which include consumer engagement, product training, soft selling techniques and public speaking. One of our core competencies is planning and facilitating all aspects of training programs for some of our larger clients, running run from 1-10 days. Many of our clients site our ongoing training and emphasis on staff development as a key reason for our long-term contracts.

EM: *How is technology helping you help clients recruit, train and deploy the best brand ambassadors?*

HP: Social Media has become front and center as a method to easily reach wide pools of talent across the country. Technologies like Skype and FaceTime enable recruiters to interview candidates quickly and more cost efficiently. Talent now utilize software to book themselves, check in and out of events, and track their payments.

EM: *Where do you stand on the W2/1099 staff classification debate?*

HP: Productions Plus was one of the first full-service talent agencies to pay all of our brand ambassadors as W2 employees. We work with one of the largest payroll platforms and all our talent can manage their bookings and pertinent personal information via an app. The “debate” is a struggle for most companies as there is an argument on both sides for classification.

EM: *What do you say to folks that may think all staffing companies are the same?*

HP: At Productions Plus, we don't consider ourselves a staffing company. We are a full-service TALENT agency. We pride ourselves on long-term client relationships, and management of our elite brand ambassadors and product specialists. We currently have multi-year contracts with 17 automotive manufacturers and have staffed as many as 7,500 talent/BAs/product specialists/program demonstrators per weekend. We are a nationwide talent agency with offices in NY, Detroit, Dallas and Orange Country, and yet we provide boutique, premier talent management and client services. Our staffing model is as unique as our agency – we provide high end talent to meet all budget needs.



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EM: *What's one of your favorite programs that featured your staff from the past year?*

HP: We have had a very exciting year, staffing hundreds of talent at Dreamforce, CES and every major auto show in the country. Our collaborative efforts with several exhibit houses have contributed to some of our key event and trade show staffing. Our product demonstrators were vital to the busy holiday season in Q4 working for over 30 different clients.

EM: *What's next for brand ambassadors?*

HP: As technological innovations progress, the importance of a BA will continue to evolve. A good BA is adept in dealing with greenscreens, social plugin and VR. This intuitive ability to grasp the latest in social and tech will help create new avenues for brand ambassadors.

EM: *What's next for your company?*

HP: We take a very strategic approach to sustainable and relevant growth within our agency. We are motivated by the ability to create tools for our clients that offer measurable results. A recent development of our patent-pending Engagement Tracker allows brand ambassadors/product specialists to gauge consumer interest by electronically noting where they are within the purchase funnel by the end of the consumer conversation.