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UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF SPECIAL EVENTS:  
A LOOK AT ONE COMPANY'S ANNUAL EVENT

by  
Eileen M. Harduk

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
June 1, 2005

Approved by

Date Approved 6/9/05

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## ABSTRACT

Eileen M. Harduk

Understanding the Impact of Special Events: A Look at One Company's Annual Event  
2005

Advisor: Joseph Basso, J.D., Ph.D., APR  
Public Relations Graduate Program

This study examines large-scale corporate entertainment to gain an understanding of the measurable impact companies who host these events receive in return. More specifically, the researcher studied one company's Appreciation Day event and collected data on how its 320 customers and suppliers felt about the company after the event and what facets of the event impacted attendees most.

Attendees were asked to participate in data collection for the research through a pen and paper survey. Responses were tabulated using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. For further understanding of the survey results, an eleven-person focus group was held to generate discussion on key topics.

Findings indicate that the large-scale special event favorably impacted the attendees' company perceptions, established the company as an industry leader and strengthened the relationships between attendees and their company contacts. Results also show that networking opportunities, followed by smooth execution of the event and refreshments, topped the list of event success factors.

## MINI-ABSTRACT

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This study examines large-scale corporate entertainment to gain an understanding of the measurable impact companies who host these events receive in return. Specifically, the researcher studied one company's special event and collected data on how customers and suppliers felt about the company after the event and what facets of the event impacted attendees most. Findings indicate that the large-scale event positively impacted the attendees' company perceptions. Results also show that networking opportunities topped the list of event success factors.

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# **Chapter I**

## **Introduction**

Business entertainment has become a significant part of most companies' fiscal budgets. The types of special events that these companies hold encompass everything from dinners to cocktail hours to sporting events. In recent years, golf outings have soared in popularity as a form of business entertainment with an increase in the number of people playing golf. According to the National Golf Foundation, the number of golfers has risen to 33 percent in the past 13 years to about 26 million in the United States (Severson, 2003). Particularly with the increase of women in management positions and those giving it a swing on the golf course, the organized outing has grown in prevalence.

Through events like golf outings, companies strive to achieve improved relationships with their customers, suppliers and employees. The time spent with customers enables employees to enjoy time with their key contacts outside of the office, in a more relaxed atmosphere. They can gain a better understanding of who their customers are, what motivates them and what important issues they have. Employees can realize closeness with customers and suppliers on a personal level that will hopefully develop into a comparable relationship on a business level.

These special events can serve to generate goodwill or a strategic purpose and are held with the hopes of:

- Forging enduring business relationships
- Providing networking opportunities

- Opening the door for new business opportunities
- Enticing new customer relationships

The success of an event could lead to the ability to leverage these relationships for more business, reap additional support from suppliers or gain a favorable company perception from the attendees. The bottom line equals more product or service sales dollars in return for the money invested.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Companies that specialize in planning corporate events flood the web, and the corporations they serve are spending millions of dollars annually on the events these companies prepare. Professionals in the planning field expect financial investments in corporate entertainment for 2004 to be minimally on par with 2003 dollars, with a potential for increased spending (Hurley, 2003). However, little research exists as it relates to the true impact of the dollars spent on business entertainment.

Experts in the special events industry respond in various ways on how to solicit input for events. PGI's C.B. Wismar notes that companies need to ask for customer input before an event to "take their temperature" about what they need and expect ([www.specialevents.com](http://www.specialevents.com), 2003). Chris Janese of TBA (The Best Always) Entertainment Corporation believes it is necessary to get feedback after the event happens and claims he hangs out in bathrooms at events and listens to what guests are saying about the experience to do so (Garber, 2003). Although this is one way to collect feedback, a more systematic method must exist to help companies understand how these events impact their guests. Why should companies who spend so much money on corporate

entertainment tiptoe around asking their attendees how they feel about their events? Why not come right out and ask them?

The economic downturn has forced companies to reserve smaller budgets to fund business entertainment and has fostered the need to reap more return on investment (ROI.) Particularly in today's environment, corporations find it necessary to cut back on expenses; so they cannot afford to be guided strictly by "gut feel" in terms of the ROI these expensive events provide. What do companies gain other than a good feeling about their target audiences for business entertainment? Is it worth the dollars they spend? And what aspects of that entertainment impact the behavior toward and perception of that company?

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examines large-scale corporate entertainment to gain an understanding of the measurable impact companies who host these events receive in return. More specifically, the researcher studied one company's event and collected data on how its customers and suppliers feel about the company after the event and what facets of the event impacted attendees most.

This global, electronic component distributor in the mid-Atlantic region spends more than \$100,000 annually hosting a golf outing in conjunction with an "appreciation day" for both customers and suppliers. The agenda entails a full day of events.

- Continental breakfast
- Golf outing with boxed lunch (including golf related contests, such as closest to the pin and longest putt)

- Complimentary drinks and cigars
- Cocktail hour with hors d'oeuvres
- Sit-down dinner and reception
- Various company speakers
- Give-aways and door prizes
- Services available from various entertainers/service providers

The event attempts to show appreciation for the company's partners but also to strengthen customer and supplier relationships, to gain positive perception from these key publics and to be viewed as the dominant player in the marketplace. To date, the impact of these goals has never been measured. The company has never formally asked for feedback on the aspects of the event itself, in the nine years it has been held, to understand how to increase attendee satisfaction and keep it from becoming redundant. Event planners like Greg Porcino, president of Golf Event Management, cite that not bringing new ideas to an event can make it stale (Severson, 2003). So what key factors impact attendees' satisfaction with the event, and how does this specific event influence their perceptions?

In this study, the researcher sought to understand the overall success of this past year's event and how it related to the company's key goals for holding it, with the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Specifically, key objectives were to determine the following.

1. Did customers and suppliers perceive the company favorably as a result of attending the event?

2. Did event perceptions of customers' and suppliers' who had previously attended this event differ from those who attended for the first time?
3. Did the event hold a stronger positive impact for people who golfed than those who only attended the cocktail hour and reception?
4. What were the success factors or suggestions for improvement of this event that may govern the preparation and planning for future Appreciation Day events?

### **Definition of the Terms**

Appreciation Day—consisted of an 18-hole round of golf, boxed lunch, cocktail hour, sit-down dinner, award ceremony and reception

Complimentary beverages—alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks were free of charge during the entirety of the event

Customers—people who do business with the company on a repeat basis

Electronic component distributor—a company that distributes electronic components, such as processors and memory to original equipment manufacturers, contract manufacturers and brokers

Entertainers/Service Providers—people hired to perform specific functions or services for participants of the outing, including: a magician, a seated-chair masseuse, a fortuneteller

Give-aways—attendees received complimentary shirts, hats, water bottles, sunscreen, golf towels, tees, golf balls, lip balm, cigars and cigar cutters

Golfers—those invited to the event who minimally participated in the round of golf and most likely the balance of the day's activities

Non-golfers—those invited to the event who attended the cocktail hour, dinner and reception but did not participate in the round of golf

Perception—a mental impression, thought or feeling

Prizes—given at the award ceremony and range from plaques to golf bags, shirts and shoes to \$100 American Express Gift Certificates

Sit-down dinner—included salad, surf and turf, vegetables, rolls and dessert, as well as complimentary beverages

Suppliers—people who work for a manufacturer’s representative or manufacturer whose products the company distributes

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

The following hypotheses were tested.

**H1** More than 50 percent of customers surveyed who attended this event had a favorable perception of the company as a result of attending the event.

**H2** More than 50 percent of suppliers who attended this event had a more favorable perception of the company as a result of attending the event.

**H3** More than 50 percent of people who attended the event in previous years were impacted less favorably by the event than people who attended for the first time.

**H4** More than 50 percent of those who did not golf and could not participate in the full day’s events were impacted less favorably by the event than those who could participate in the entire event.

The researcher also explored the following research questions.

**RQ1** What factors of the event most influenced customers and suppliers satisfaction with the event?

**RQ2** What factors of the event brought attendees the least satisfaction?

**RQ3** What suggestions did attendees have for future events?

**RQ4** What compelled people to attend the event?

### **The Assumptions**

The researcher made the following assumptions in conducting this research:

1. Survey respondents answered questions honestly and set aside previous biases.
2. The population, from which the research data was collected, was a fair representation of the entirety of the customers and suppliers in this specific industry and marketplace that deal with this specific company.
3. Those who responded to the questionnaires were actually the people who attended the event.

### **The Limitations**

The following limitations were realized about conducting this research.

1. The results of this study were limited to one particular company, its particular industry and the specific event described.
2. The population for this study was limited to the people who were selected to attend the event by employees of this company.



3. No information was collected on other events or occurrences with relationship to this company previous to the event that may have impacted the results from this study.
4. No external factors that the company cannot control, such as personal circumstances of attendees, were considered in the study, even though they may have impacted the attendees' satisfaction with the event.
5. Data collected from the focus group may be skewed based on the reduced possibility of participant interaction, since it was conducted via conference call.

### **Significance of the Study**

The research data collected and analyzed in this study provided formal feedback, for the first time, to the company which held the event. Planners of the event can use this data to help substantiate the dollars spent or re-appropriate dollars toward expense from which they can measure positive results. The results can assist them in spending their budget effectively and may increase the level of loyalty that exists from their customers and suppliers as a result. The feedback will enable changes to keep the event fresh and potentially gain more positive impact in the future. Ultimately, the data should guide the company to increase return from the event and provide for changes to make the event a more pleasant experience for participants.

The knowledge obtained from this study could prompt other corporations to measure the results of their special events. This research may indicate what types of business entertainment to provide and which influence their target audiences most positively. Tangible measurement will explain how entertainment impacts the desired

results, if the dollars associated are being spent wisely and what aspects of an event are valued. This research could benefit Public Relations (PR) professionals who plan these events providing more research from which to draw and consider in planning the elements of their own events, as well as supply them with data to support their decisions. It will enable them to justify their budgets and encourage them to solicit feedback from their own events. Most importantly, companies will better understand the role of special events in impacting their publics' perceptions.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of the Literature**

The researcher conducted a review of related literature to better understand what already exists in the area of this thesis topic. The search consisted of four avenues:

- Proquest electronic databases including ABI/INFORM Global, Dateline, Trade & Industry, Alt-PressWatch, Banking Information Source, Criminal Justice Periodicals, Ethnic NewsWatch, GenderWatch, Hoover's Company Records, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal
- [www.Google.com](http://www.Google.com) and [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com) search engines
- Rowan University Campbell Library circulation database
- Various university text books

Key words explored were “special events,” “image,” “marketing,” “perceptions,” “public opinion,” “event marketing,” “customer relationships,” “public relations” and “publicity.” No articles were found that specifically referenced a study of attendees’ perceptions of a company as a result of participating in a special event, but some closely linked topics were discovered.

### **Examining the Elements of Special Events**

The case study most closely linked to the Appreciation Day event was a study of the 1998 Coca-Cola Masters Surfing event in Australia. The study attempted to understand the impact of intangible aspects of an event, such as atmosphere and

uniqueness, or service quality, on the success of the event. Service quality was defined as the difference between the customers' expectations and perceptions. It sought to prove if total event satisfaction and positive attendee perceptions would influence event-related expenditure and repeat visitation.

Three research methods were employed to gauge feedback: a questionnaire, log books and observation. The 21 question survey was administered to 500 random visitors, participants, sponsors and event coordinators over the final two days of the event, asking them to rate their perceptions of the event by scale. One hundred thirty-nine usable surveys were analyzed. Log books were placed in several locations throughout the event for participant comments. Researchers also took part in the event and were studied as if they were customers to evaluate their experience.

The researchers concluded that market research was vital to identify the perceptions of event success through both formal and informal methods. Research must be performed objectively and by reliable measures. Information obtained should then be communicated to all event organizers to make improvements and strive toward greater event satisfaction (O'Neill, Getz & Carlsen, 1999).

### **Special Events Planning**

Although some events just occur, many events are the result of careful planning and can generate a tremendous amount of *buzz*. University professor and author M. Larry Litwin, APR defines special events as "stimulating an interest in a person, product or organization by means of a focused 'happening.'" Also, activities designed to interact with

publics and listening to them” (Litwin, 2003, p. 213). Special events carry messages in grandiose ways and are designed to gain favorable company exposure.

Author E. W. Brody says, “Special events universally succeed or fail in keeping with the quality and volume of planning undertaken in preparing for them.” Planners should consider the ability to relate messages cost-effectively to target audiences, as well as the appropriateness of the event type, as a basis for determining whether to conduct an event. If the event can be repetitive, it compounds the benefits (Brody, 1988, p. 243). Full scale planning efforts occur once, which makes less planning time necessary for each successive event. The amount of effort to successfully execute is guided by the company’s commitment and the type of event proposed, but thorough planning is essential to goal achievement (Brody, p. 223).

### Components of Events

Brody lists multiple elements to take into account when organizing an event:

- Planning and scheduling not only the entirety of the event but also each individual agenda item
- Developing and controlling/maintaining budgets
- Using proper facilities and deploying adequate staff
- Providing food and beverage services
- Preparing speakers, chairpersons and masters of ceremony (Brody, p. 243-244).

Litwin adds a few tips to consider.

- Develop a Gantt chart for your planning timeline.

- Have a back-up plan.
- Keep excellent event records.
- Outline ROI for participating sponsors (Litwin, p. 215).

Some questions that should also be asked include the following.

- Is signage planned appropriately?
- Are sponsors clearly identified?
- Can awards be created and presented?
- Should the media cover the event (Harris, 1991, p. 196-197)?

To add some creativity to an event, Brooks adds that event planners should choose a theme and then reflect that theme throughout different aspects, such as invitations, decorations, entertainment and give-aways (2001).

### The Purpose of Special Events

A few article topics centered on networking events specifically. An article that appeared in the New Pittsburgh Courier called “Golf outings help build business relationships” referred directly to golf outings as a way to build relationships with customers away from the office. In fact an organization called SMC Business Councils sponsors outings for the purpose of providing members the opportunity to meet other members and potential prospects with whom to network. Outings are also seen as a vehicle by which to express customer appreciation. The article mentions the importance of assigning appropriate golf partners to accomplish business objectives, as well (New Pittsburgh Courier, 2000).

Large corporations like IBM hold annual conferences for the purpose of relationship development. IBM intentionally invites industry partners who can serve as allies, including not only customers but also consultants, complementary software companies and service partners. Speakers and trade secrets do not draw people in, but the opportunity to make informal contact on the golf course and at pool-side buffets does (Wall Street Journal, 1986).

## **Psychological Theory**

### Persuasive Theory

Advertisers, public relations practitioners and salespeople look for methods of persuading their publics and attempting to change their attitudes, opinions and behavior. According to James W. Kalat, a professor of psychology and author, an attitude can be defined as a learned response or a positive or negative feeling toward something. He described two theories on changing people's attitudes: cognitive dissonance and the self-perception theory. Research supports that "one of the most effective ways to change people's attitudes is to change their behavior first" (Kalat, 1986, p. 573). In the theory of cognitive dissonance, individuals will alter their attitudes to align them with their actions in order to reduce internal tension. The self-perception theory suggests that people want to understand their own behavior and will also adapt their attitudes to match behavior but simply from observing and explaining their actions, as opposed to experiencing tension (Kalat, p. 577).

Providing new information or reasons for change can influence people, although they may distort information to support the attitudes they already have. Psychologists

discovered that hearing from a credible source on topics influences people too, and that persuasion has more lasting effects if it occurs slowly over time. Two methods seem to effectively influence people: either asking for more and compromising for something less or asking for something small and building up to a larger request (Kalat, p. 572-573).

According to Brody, five phases are considered in the persuasive process in public relations: reception, consideration, comprehension, assimilation and response. An idea must first be received by an audience for them to consider it. Then the idea must be comprehended as it was intended. As author Steuart Henderson Britt (1978) explained, regardless of the amount of creativity used in marketing or advertising, “it is of no value if the audience does not perceive the message correctly” (Britt, p. 107). Next, the audience must retain the evaluated message, so they may act on it. Lastly, for the response to apply, other factors may need consideration. As an example, someone may want to buy the sports car he saw on a commercial but may not have the budget to do so (Brody, p. 109-110).

### Public Opinion

Opinions are less ingrained in people than attitudes and are easily changed and readily influenced by events (Brody, p. 107). In fact, the father of PR, Edward Bernays (1928) said “Industries, public utilities, educational movements, indeed all groups representing any concept or product, whether they are majority or minority ideas, succeed only because of approving public opinion. Public opinion is the unacknowledged partner in all broad efforts” (Bernays, p. 285).



## Perception

Britt speaks of perceiving as a “process of filtering physical sensations into meaningful thoughts or concepts through an audience member’s experiences...An individual categorizes stimuli in terms of his expectations, prejudices and beliefs.” Perceiving is not just attending but also attaching meaning to something (Britt, p. 105). Like in succumbing to persuasion, people rely heavily on past experience in forming perceptions. People derive perceptions from what they know or at least what they think they know, which in part explains why two people can experience the same thing and see it differently (Marconi, 1996, p. 3).

In order to create perceptions, a steady flow of information must exist to raise awareness. As a result, the chances of influencing how people perceive a company increases. A common perception is that if a product is more well-known it is better than the competition’s product, so absence of information could leave it to the competition to define a company, product or person. Negative perceptions can be impacted by changing parts of the strategic plan that do not reap results. Positive perceptions are often reflected by the good will a company does in the community or its participation in charitable events. Once a positive perception is gained, public relations efforts, such as annual events and sponsorships can maintain that perception well (Marconi, p. 17-22).

Understanding how people perceive a company, product, service and competition is beneficial. People make decisions, such as whether to buy a product or not, based on perceptions; and they influence others by sharing perceptions. After all, as image

marketing expert Joe Marconi said, “The perception is reality. Everything else is an illusion” (Marconi, p. 5).

## **The Marketing View**

### Image

Marconi defines an image as a reflection of perceptions, and he applies image marketing to build and project images that appeal to people’s aspirations. His outline to create, present and maintain a company’s public image details many considerations in solidifying positive public opinion. A few highlights include:

- Clearly define the image you aspire to have
- Stress your uniqueness
- Define your audience
- Do well by doing good – Adopt a cause that will demonstrate you are a concerned, benevolent part of the community
- Make your support of a cause fit your own image and business – as an example, Ben & Jerry’s donates a portion of their profits to small farms in underdeveloped areas where they purchase ingredients for their ice cream (Marconi, p. 209-216).

Marconi says success with image marketing will pay off because, “a good image nurtured, protected and brought to full bloom can create a halo that will light up the personality, the product, the company and the stock market” (Marconi, p. xviii).

## Integrated Marketing Communication

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) combines traditional marketing techniques with other disciplines for a holistic approach, encompassing everything from advertising to public relations to sales promotion. The goal is to create synergy (Litwin, p. 123). Organizations that embrace IMC engage in a high level of communication within their organization and with external suppliers. They collect vast amounts of customer information from a multitude of sources using market research to develop communications plans and activities. As a best practice, these companies also widely share the data internally. IMC companies have formalized programs to prioritize their highest volume sales customers and often include suppliers in planning meetings (Schultz & Schultz, 2004, p. 24-29).

## **Public Relations Planning**

### Two-way communication

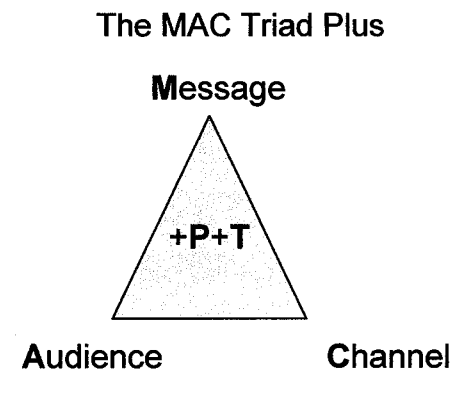
PR practitioners James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt (1984) spoke of four public relations models of organizational communications with their publics. Propaganda was often used in the 1940's to reveal information to the public in the form of one-way communication with truth not significant in its content. The public information method followed, also a one-way communication model but with regard for truth in information dissemination. That then evolved into the two-way asymmetrical model, where a company develops messages based on research in efforts to persuade its publics to act as it wishes. The company seeks feedback on its public attitudes to serve its own needs. Today, many companies have progressed to the two-way symmetrical model.

In this model, organizations attempt to strike a balance between their needs and the needs of their publics by conducting formative research to formulate an effective plan. Companies that prescribe to this model, as opposed to a two-way asymmetrical model, engage in mutual understanding with their strategic publics and are often more effective in improving relationships with them, as well as in achieving their own goals (Grunig & Hunt, p. 8-9, 20). This balanced, two-way communication proves important in special events planning to understand the needs of the company's publics and to identify how the company is performing to expectations.

#### Message, Audience, Channel

Along with the communication model, the MAC Triad takes into account the message, audience and channel of communication. Is the message scripted properly? Is the target audience determined? Which channel will best deliver that message in order to avoid failure? Litwin suggests that the added variables of purpose and timing must be selected carefully for optimal execution (Litwin, p. 9).

*Figure 1*



Four major medium exist that break down further into channels: print, face-to-face, electronic and special events. Channels are variations of these medium (Fulginiti & Bagin, 2005). Award ceremonies, parties, banquets and golf outings are examples of special event channels.

### Research

In taking on public relations activities, a four step process called R-PIE can help ensure success (Litwin, p. 9).

#### **Research Planning Implementation Evaluation**

Formative research assists in formulating the plan and avoiding guesswork. University professors Anthony Fulginiti and Donald Bagin, Ph.D. say research identifies the audiences to target and helps to marry the proper message and channel to those audiences. It narrows the focus so that the plan remains productive and manageable and supports the construction of appropriate goals, objectives, strategies and tactics (Fulginiti & Bagin, 2005). Litwin adds that research can decrease management isolation, aid in persuasion by clearly recognizing attitudes or opinions and allow for pretest of scripted messages (Litwin, p. 22). Research can also establish baselines and benchmarks (Litwin, p. 10) and identify the demographics of targets markets, revealing what factors motivate people (Marconi, p. 11).

Evaluative research gains feedback at the conclusion of events, product launches or campaigns. It helps discern how well a plan was implemented and determines if the portrayed messages were received and retained. It provides information about improvements and suggestions, as well as affirms current choices. Importantly, research

can also quantify achievement or the ROI for the event budget spent. Without feedback, doubt may lead to unnecessary changes (Marconi, p. 8).

### **Summary**

A literature review is essential to examine when planning and executing an event; however, the researcher found no study that encompassed specifics in each respective area as applicable to the Appreciation Day event. This new research will bridge the gap for those planning the Appreciation Day and other events, reinforcing the need to consider all variables and fully explore event possibilities for its elements to make it optimally successful. The results should help answer the following questions.

- What is the relevance of Appreciation Day as a networking opportunity?
- Are adequate amounts of two-way communication being used?
- Is this event the most beneficial channel by which this company's messages should be portrayed to its key publics?
- How are attendees' perceptions persuaded by this event?
- What image does this company fair in its industry?
- Will the market research support event changes?
- Will evaluative research be conclusive and continuous?
- How may IMC influence suppliers' future roles in the planning process?
- Most importantly, what is the ROI for this costly marketing event?

## **Chapter III**

### **Research Design**

The population from this research mirrors the population of external publics in attendance at the Appreciation Day. All customers and suppliers invited to the event, 320 people total, were asked to participate in data collection for the research with the exception of attendees for whom addresses were not available in the company database. One hundred seventy-nine of 180 customers invited to participate represented 70 unique companies with positions and departments including purchasing and materials management, buyers, planners, engineering managers, engineers and executive management.

Ninety-one of the 140 supplier contacts invited and asked to participate represented 32 companies, either manufacturer's representatives or manufacturer direct employees. Their positions range from Field Application Engineers (FAEs) to sales representatives to local and regional management.

### **Instruments**

#### **Quantitative**

The quantitative survey instrument (Appendix A) was designed to gather data on the perceptions of the company that holds the Appreciation Day based on attendance to that event, as well as to understand what key elements most impacted participants' satisfaction with the event. All research questions and hypotheses were explored.

The researcher used a three-part pen and paper survey. The first part, consisting of six questions, sought demographic information: age, gender, job title and length of relationship with the company. These responses provided important variables to analyze the population.

Questions in the second section focused mainly on the components of the event: timing, agenda and elements. Respondents were asked to check off events they participated in, as well as rank aspects of the events. Space was also provided to include suggestions for future events. All responses in this section should help govern the planning and budgeting of future events for this company.

The third and final part of the questionnaire explored attendees perceptions of the company based on the event. Nine, five-part Likert scale questions were used to understand the degree to which respondents agreed or disagreed with provided statements. The ratings used were as follows:

1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=undecided, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

Four other questions, which were constructed to understand perceived market position, asked attendees to compare the distributor and its event to competitors and their events. Finally, one question asked what motivated participants to attend.

### Qualitative

The qualitative research instrument (Appendix B) was designed to provoke discussion among attendees of the event. One, one-hour focus group took place consisting of four suppliers to the distributor and seven customers. The focus group was held via a conference call service with a dial-in number, so it could be recorded. The



researcher and an assistant served as moderators for the group. Participants signed consent forms for this research and mailed them to the researcher prior to the call.

The instrument was developed to gain an understanding of the following.

1. What specific components of the event did attendees like or value and why?
2. What specific components of the event did attendees dislike or see as not valuable and why?
3. What suggestions did attendees have to improve or enhance future events?
4. How did the event itself influence attendees' impression of the distributor as a company or partner?

Focus group participants volunteered to partake in the call by faxing in a focus group participation form. All those who volunteered were chosen. Each participant in the focus groups received two complimentary movie passes to AMC Theaters in gratitude for his/her participation.

Both the quantitative and qualitative research instruments were devised based on suggested methods in Leedy and Ormod's "Practical Research" (2001). The researcher also gathered input from Rowan University faculty members and graduate students, as well as key management contacts from the distributor.

### **Pilot Instruments**

#### Quantitative

On June 1, 2004, a pilot instrument of the quantitative questionnaire was administered to a sample of 14 employees of the electronic component distributor, who attended the event. Participants included field sales people, field sales managers and

supplier business managers, as well as the researcher. The feedback was not solicited to be analyzed within the actual research, but instead, to anticipate customer and supplier responses based on differing personalities, individual key issues and thorough understanding of the event. Some of these employees also held positions at previous companies where they were customers and suppliers to the distributor and had attended the event as an invited guest. Two employees who had never participated in past Appreciation Day events were also included in the pre-test, hoping that their feedback would provide an objective eye.

During the pilot study, the time it took to fill out the survey was estimated to guide potential survey respondents about how long it would take to participate. Based on the pre-test feedback, the researcher made necessary changes to the questionnaire. The wording of some questions was tweaked, and the document layout was adjusted to optimize the survey response in the actual study.

### Qualitative

On Friday, April 23, 2004, all members of the distributor management team were given copies of the qualitative instrument to suggest changes. Subsequently, both the field and inside sales teams received copies of the instrument to make suggestions. The researcher gathered feedback and made necessary changes to the questionnaire in preparation for the real study.

## **Procedures**

### Quantitative

The Appreciation Day event took place on Thursday May 27, 2004, and the attendee list was confirmed by Wednesday June 3, 2004. Quantitative surveys were mailed to customers on Friday June 4, 2004, and to suppliers on Monday June 7, 2004, ensuring that participants received them within two weeks of the event. A query letter detailing the research and an invitation for a follow-up focus group were included with the validated survey. Participants were given a pre-addressed, stamped envelope to return the survey and were asked to do so by Friday June 18, 2004. On Friday July 16, 2004, a follow up letter was sent to those who received a survey but had not yet responded with an extended reply date of Friday August 13, 2004.

One hundred thirty-seven of 270 surveys were returned – a response rate of just over 50 percent. Eighty-nine surveys were returned from the first mailing and 48 from the second. Customers completed 97 surveys: 69 from the first mailing and 28 from the second. Suppliers completed 40 surveys: 20 from the first mailing and 20 from the second.

### Qualitative

On Wednesday July 14, 2004, the researcher contacted potential focus group candidates to confirm their participation. The call took place on Thursday July 15, 2004, from 5:30P.M. – 6:30P.M. In order to preserve the integrity of the responses received from the focus group, the researcher moderating was not identified as an employee of the

electronic component distributor to participants during the call or at any other point in the research. Upon completion of the call, the researcher reviewed the audio recording and transcribed the dialogue.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to analyze the quantitative instrument. Descriptive statistics were used to report demographic data in the quantitative instrument, and inferential statistics were reported to summarize the responses to close-ended survey questions as outlined in the next chapter. The researcher grouped and analyzed responses to open-ended survey questions, as well as focus group questions, to determine support for or against the hypotheses and to assist in answering research questions.

## Chapter IV

### Results

#### Pen and Paper Survey Results

One hundred thirty-three of the 137 surveys returned were usable. Four surveys fell out due to incomplete data. Based on 133 usable responses, the results from the research are applicable to the entire population of attendees with greater than a 95 percent confidence level. Despite the pilot which showed no signs of these potential issues, two questions were answered incorrectly on several surveys: Question 8 had 72 respondents and Question 12 had 106 respondents; and therefore, they have a somewhat lower confidence rate.

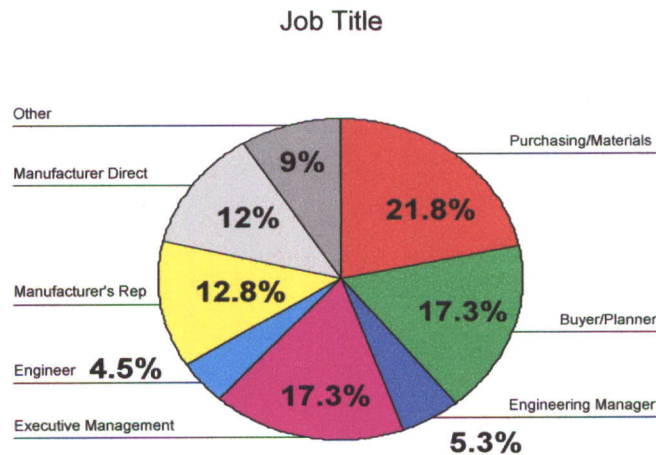
Question 1: Which best fits your job title or description?

Purchasing/Materials Manager  
Executive Management  
Manufacturer Direct Employee

Buyer/Planner  
Engineer  
Other

Engineering Manager  
Manufacturer's Rep

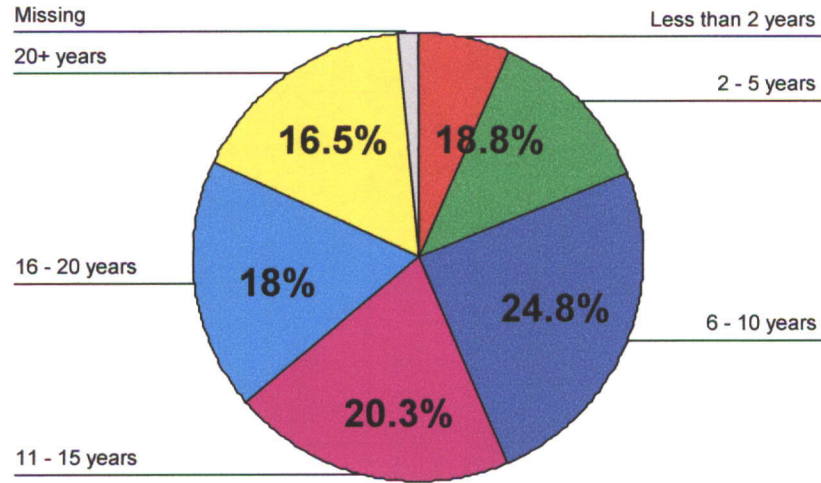
*Figure 2*



Question 2: How many years have you been dealing with this company?

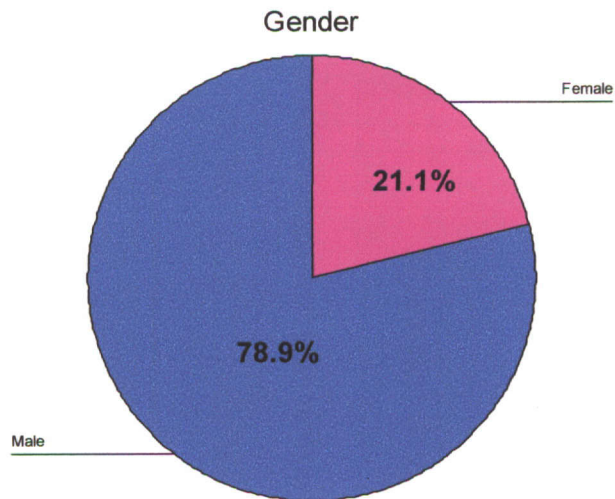
*Figure 3*

Number of years dealing with co.



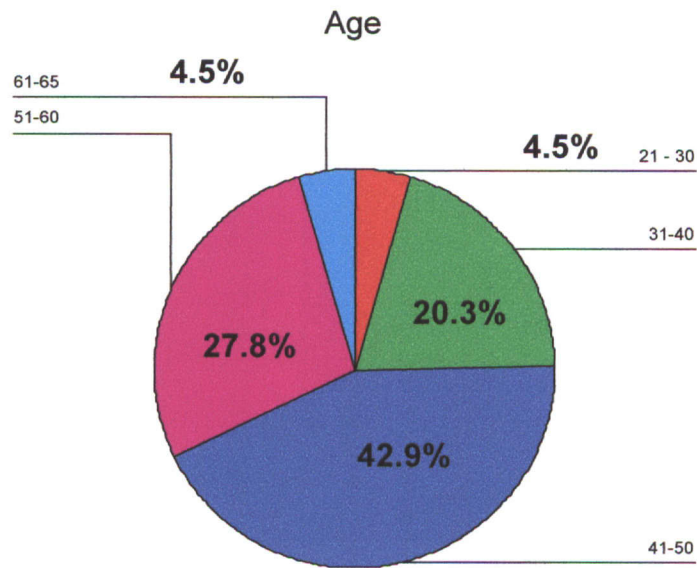
Question 3: What is your gender?

*Figure 4*



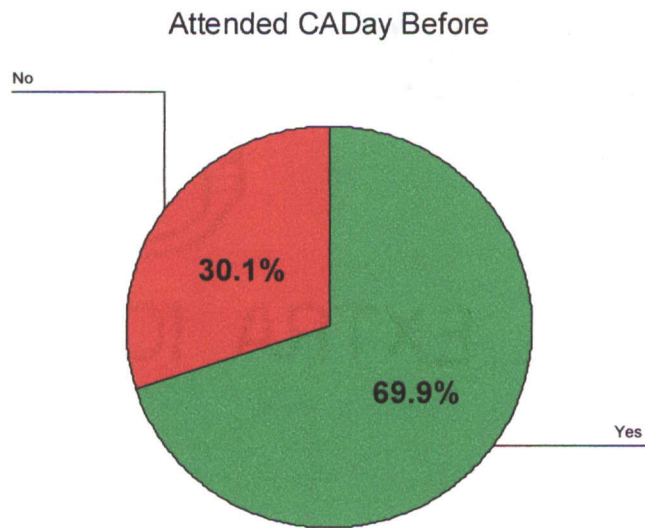
Question 4: What is your age range?

*Figure 5*



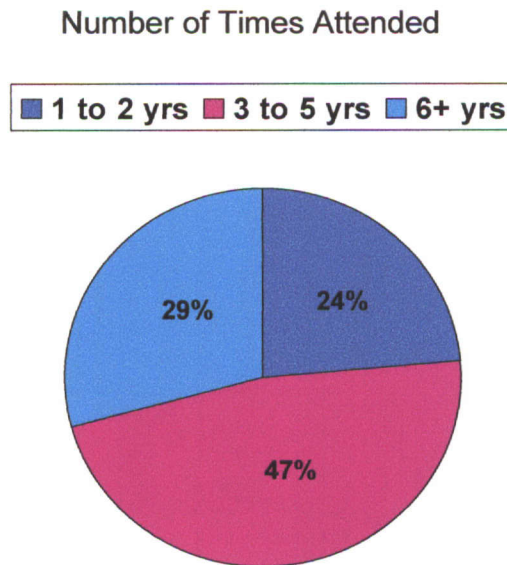
Questions 5: Have you attended the Appreciation Day previous to the 2004 event?

*Figure 6*



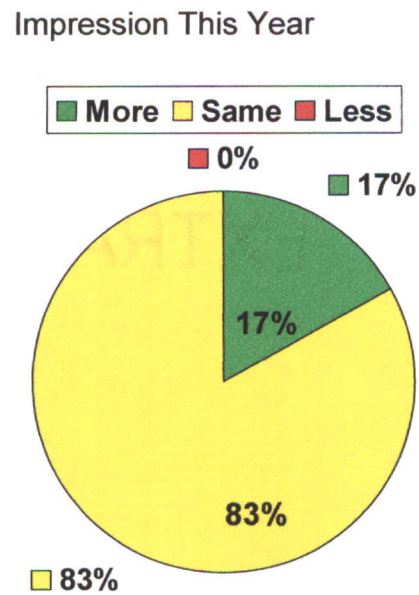
Question 5A: *If yes, how many times have you attended in the past?*

Figure 7



Question 5B: *How impressed were you this year vs. past years? Why?*

Figure 8

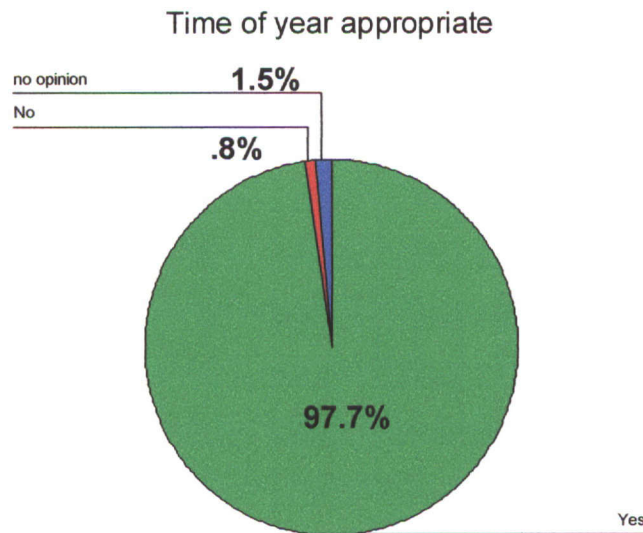




Comments as to why attendees thought the event had about the same impact year on year referred to the event's elements being just that – the same. Although it is already a great event, people feel it needs something to keep it fresh. One customer said, “(It) needs to be changed! Every year is the same format. (It) needs change to keep the excitement level high.”

Question 6: Do you think the time of year the event is held is appropriate? Why or why not?

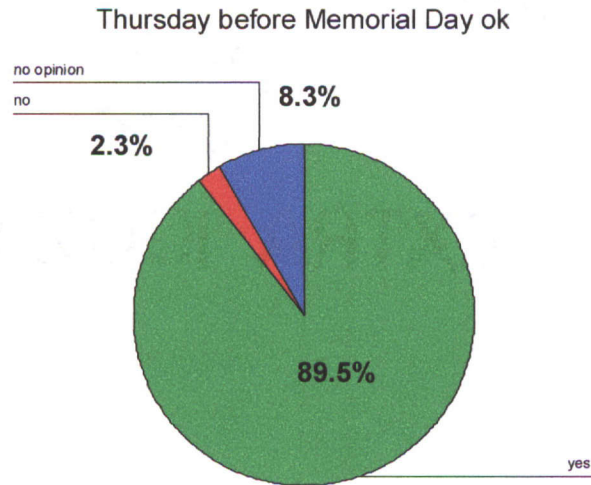
Figure 9



Most who commented felt the event was a great kickoff to the spring season and said that the weather is pleasant that time of year.

Question 7: Do you like that this event is held the same day each year — Thursday before Memorial Day? Why or why not?

Figure 10



Some respondents were unaware that the event is held on the same day each year, although most of them liked it once they realized. For those who knew of the consistent date and agreed it was good, most liked it for planning purposes and said it enabled them to request vacation that Friday and enjoy a long holiday weekend.

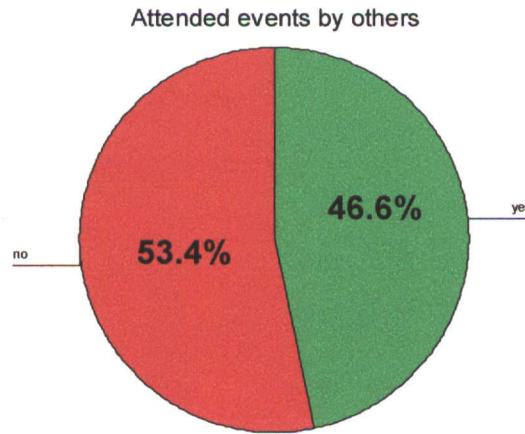
Question 8: I attended Appreciation Day because:  
*Please rank from 1 to 6 (1 being the most important.)*

*Ranked, weighted averages*

- 1.65** I wanted to spend time forging stronger relationships with this company's people.
- 2.76** I wanted to spend time forging better relationships with other industry contacts
- 2.81** I wanted my contacts at the company to better understand my/company's needs.
- 3.86** I wanted to better understand this company.
- 4.67** I needed a day away from the office.
- 5.19** I wanted to work on my golf game.

Question 9: Have you attended similar events by other companies in the industry?

*Figure 11*



Question 9A: *If yes, whose event did you attend? (Please list.)*

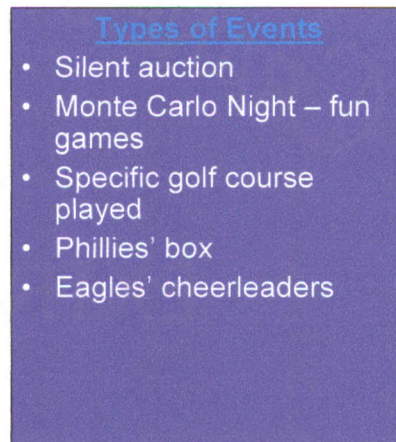
- Arrow
- TI
- Panasonic
- KOA
- Nu Horizons
- Airco
- Tech-Aid
- AMCC
- Future
- Insight
- TTI

Question 9B: What did you like about their event?

*Figure 12*



*Figure 13*



**Question 10:** Which of the following did you participate in or visit with during the day's events?

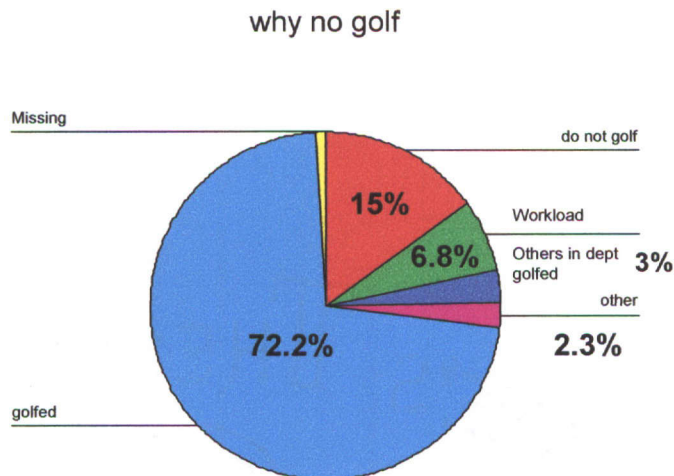
Golf	72.2%	Seated-chair masseuse	17.3%
Golf Contests	63.2%	Fortuneteller	10.5%
Dinner/Reception	90.2%	Magician	21.8%

*\* Percentages reflect those that participated in the listed events.*

**Question 11:** If you did **NOT** golf during the event, what reason **best** describes why?

- I do not golf.
- I was unable to leave the office for the day due to workload.
- I was unable to leave the office, because others in my department were golfing.
- Other (Please list.)

Figure 14

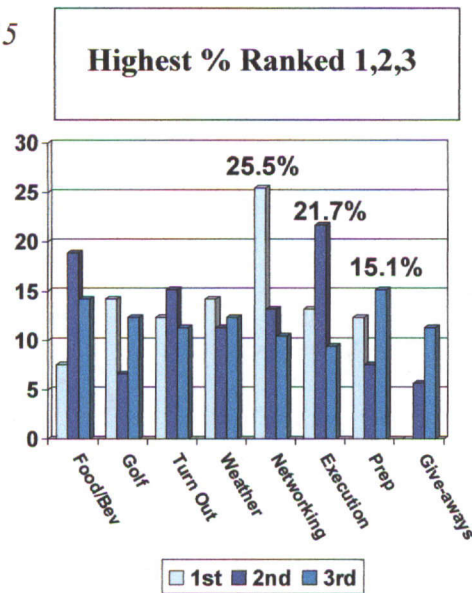


**Question 12:** Which of the following do you think are most important to the event's success?

*Please rank your top 3 from 1 to 3 (1 being the most important.)*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decorations                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation/Attention to details  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Give-aways: shirts, golf gear, etc.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Weather                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food/Beverages                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Magician, masseuse, fortuneteller |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Door prizes/golf prizes              | <input type="checkbox"/> Networking opportunities          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Golf                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Musical entertainment             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Smooth execution of the day's events |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Turn out/Attendance                  |  |

Figure 15



The highest percentage of ranked votes for the top three most important aspects of the event (illustrated in the bar chart above) encompasses those that got the most votes for first, second and third: networking, execution and preparation, respectively. In terms of most votes overall, the top five rank as follows.

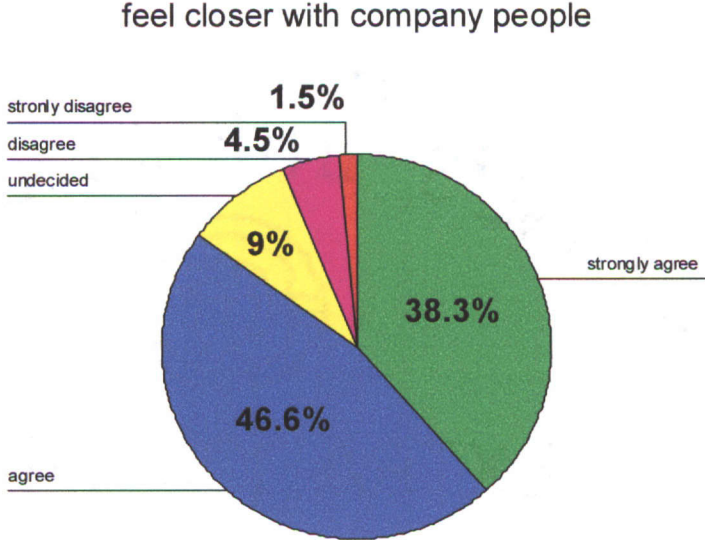
1. Networking opportunities
2. Smooth execution
3. Food/Beverages
4. Turn out/Attendance
5. Weather

Those that did not rank or fell within the margin of error include:

- Decorations
- Music
- Fortuneteller, masseuse, magician <2%
- Door/golf prizes <3%

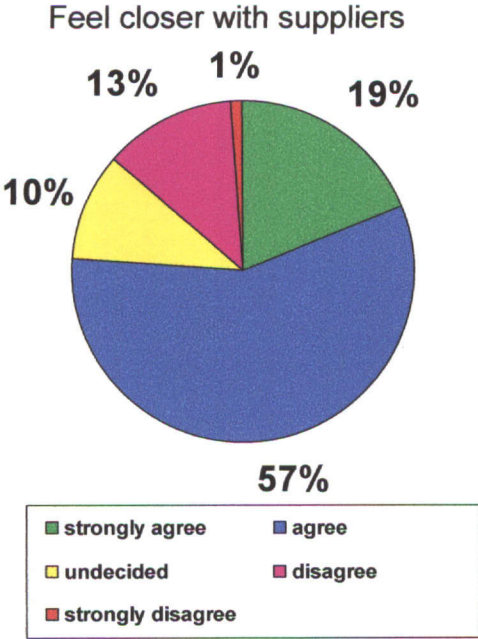
Question13: I feel that I have a closer personal relationship with contacts at the company as a result of attending this event.

Figure 16



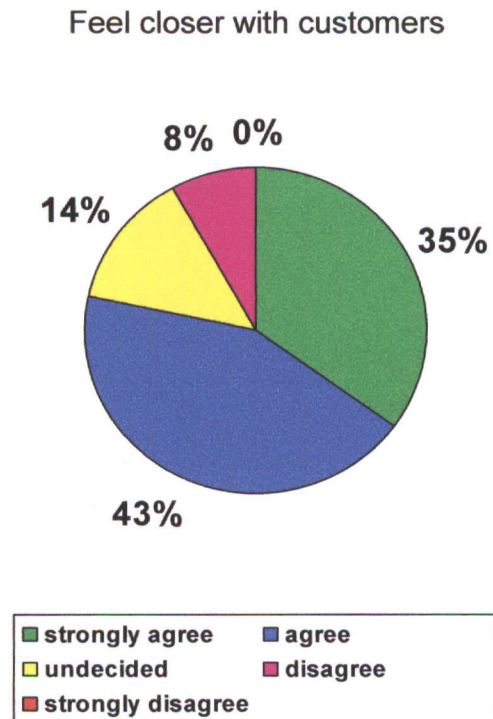
Question 14: I feel that I have closer personal relationships with suppliers and/or manufacturers' representatives as a result of attending the Appreciation Day event.

Figure 17



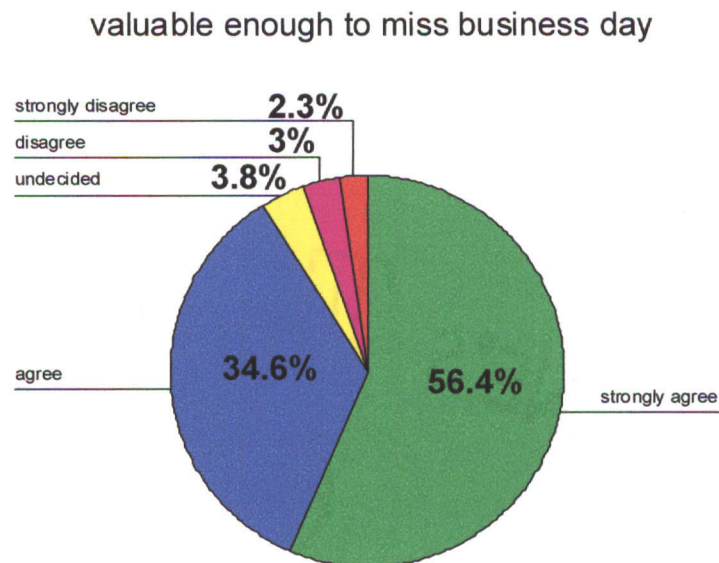
Question 15: I feel that I have a closer relationship with customers as a result of attending the Appreciation Day.

Figure 18



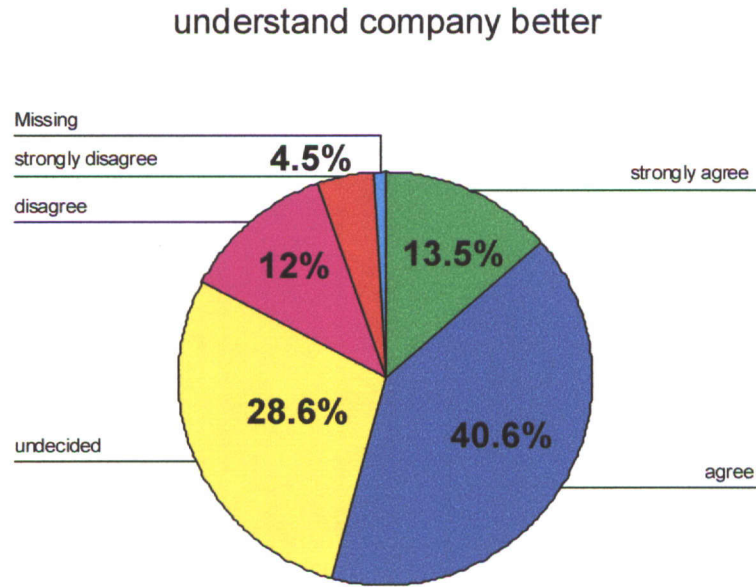
Question 16: I feel the event is valuable enough to warrant taking time out of regular business hours to participate.

Figure 19



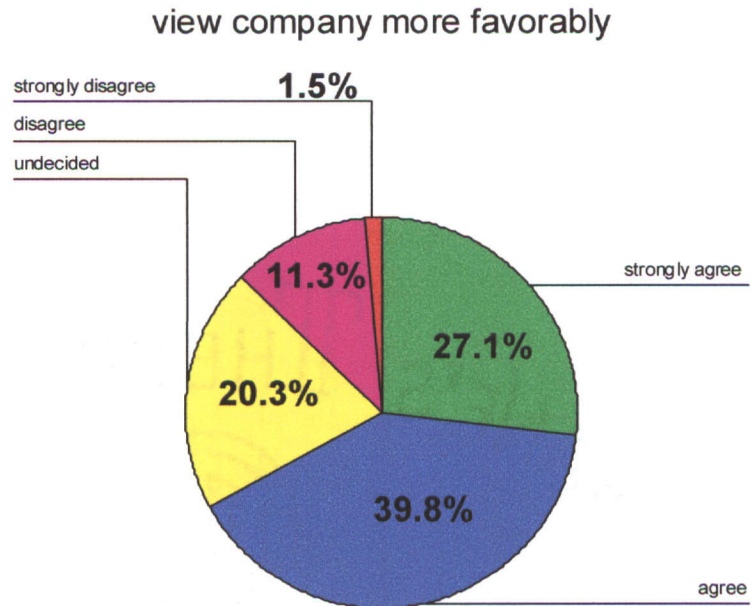
Question 17: I feel that I better understand this company's charter as a result of attending the event.

Figure 20



Question 18: I view this company more favorably as a result of attending the event.

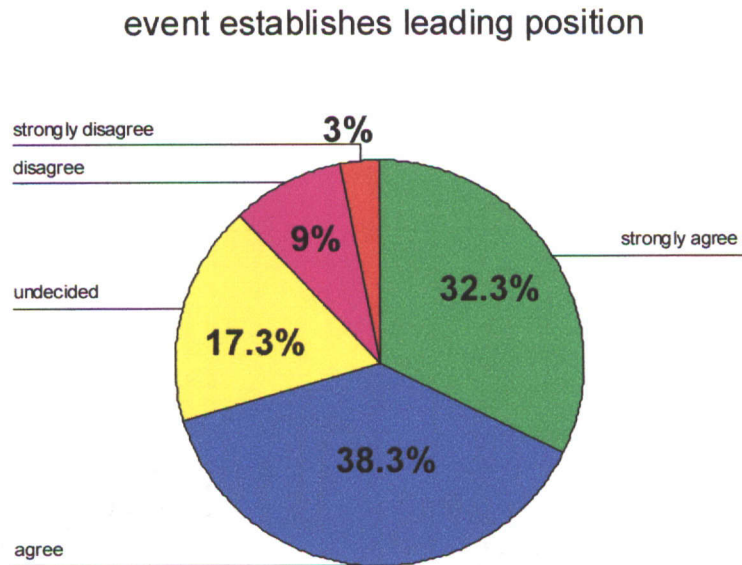
Figure 21





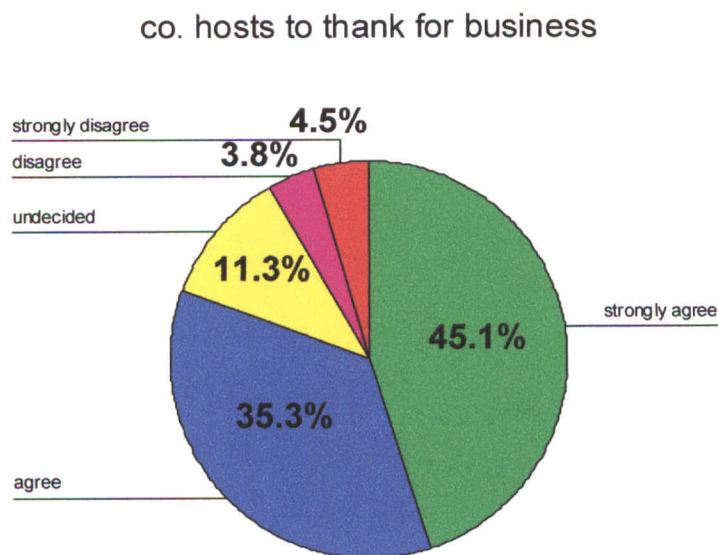
Question 19: As a result of holding this event for many years, I think this company has helped establish a leading position in the industry.

Figure 22



Question 20: I feel this company hosts this event to thank me for my business and support.

Figure 23



Question 21: What changes or suggestions do you have for future Appreciation Days that you think may enhance or improve the event?

Most of the suggestions centered on speeding up the round of golf and re-thinking the dinner arrangements. With over 300 golfers and 12 people starting at each hole, the round takes about six hours. Suggestions ranged from putting no more than five people at a hole to inviting fewer golfers to using two courses for the golf game and regrouping for dinner.

Comments about the dinner mentioned that food was poorly cooked and that the seating arrangements were uncomfortable and confusing. Half the dinner seating resides inside the golf course clubhouse and half outside. This makes the party seem disjointed and causes attendees to question where they are supposed to sit. Suggestions offered focused on more cohesive dinner seating, as well as a possible buffet and different menu items.

A sample of some other suggestions is as follows.

- Hand out supplier and product information – which references the “Tech Fair” the company held previous to the Appreciation Day.
- Set up a hot dog stand after nine holes.
- Put more port-a-potties on the course.
- Shorten the awards and speeches.
- Eliminate the hole-in-one and putting contests in the beginning because of time constraints and potential attendee embarrassment.
- Exhibit more awareness of and appreciation for supplier contributions.

Although only suggestions were solicited, many customers and suppliers felt compelled to make positive comments about the event, which speaks to participants' appreciation for the invitation. Attendees commented as follows.

"It was wonderful."

"Was perfect!"

"Thank you!"

"I look forward to coming each year."

"Very impressive."

"I'd offer to pay to play. That's how nice it is."

"I feel (the company) does a fantastic job and we appreciate the opportunity to attend."

### **Focus Group Results**

Participants in the focus group represented just under four percent of the total supplier attendees and an equal percentage of the total customer attendees. The mix of people who participated represented various parts of the event population, such as large and small manufacturers, manufacturers' representatives and direct people, customers who have dealt with the company for a long and short time, first time and repeat attendees, and people who used to work for the company but are now members of the event's target audiences. This research acted as a confirmation of the information gained through the surveys, as well as allowed the researcher and moderator to ask further questions in each area to gather a more in-depth understanding. The moderator asked four general questions.

1. What specific components of the event did you like or value and why?
2. What specific components of the event did you dislike or see as not valuable and why?
3. What suggestions do you have to improve or enhance future events?
4. How has the event itself affected your impression of the distributor as a company/partner?

Questions 1, 2 and 4 can be summarized into these four categories of responses.

Figure 24

<p style="text-align: center; color: #90ee90;"><u>Likes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weather</li> <li>• Professional, well run/organized</li> <li>• Treatment received from company people</li> <li>• Turn out, seeing those you haven't lately</li> <li>• Hiring back Sean</li> <li>• Charity event – nice touch</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center; color: #ff6347;"><u>Dislikes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dinner seating tight &amp; no organization</li> <li>• Handling of supplier contributions, how many people they get to send &amp; general feeling about how they are approached</li> <li>• Issues with masseuse &amp; fortune teller</li> <li>• They didn't easily come to mind, but came up over the course of the call</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center; color: #6495ed;"><u>Perceptions 1<sup>st</sup> Timers</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impressed with how well run, top of the line &amp; "fancy" it was</li> <li>• Positively impacted their perception of Avnet</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center; color: #ffff00;"><u>Perceptions Repeat Offenders</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Event does not change their opinion of Avnet but enforces an already existing opinion</li> <li>• Already have favorable opinions</li> <li>• <b>Must match the company's level of class &amp; professionalism</b></li> </ul>

Suggestions to improve the event (Question 3) came only after a short period of silence and some prodding. The group discussion reconfirmed the tightness and confusion of dinner seating. One group member suggested that he would prefer everyone in one big room as opposed to spilling outside into two areas. Issues about the handling of supplier invitations also surfaced. A few suppliers seemed unsure of how many people

they were able to bring from their organizations until very near to the event date.

Sponsorship contribution level determines the head count from each individual supplier organization, but they seemed unclear on the number of people they can bring for each donation level. One supplier, when asked about his event invitation was handled, even went so far as to call the method of asking for contributions “strong arming by the (company) people.” He felt he needed more clear guidelines on what their sponsorship equates to in attendee slots and would prefer the request for money be handled more tactfully.

Lastly, concerns arose about service providers available throughout the event. The company employs a fortune teller and masseuse during cocktail hour. Two women agreed that signage to instruct people on where to find these service providers ceases to exist. Lines to take advantage of the services were long, and both the masseuse and fortune teller left with people still waiting in line. For those attending the evening portion only, this encounter was their first impression of the event.

## **Chapter V**

### **Interpretation and Suggestions**

#### **Hypotheses**

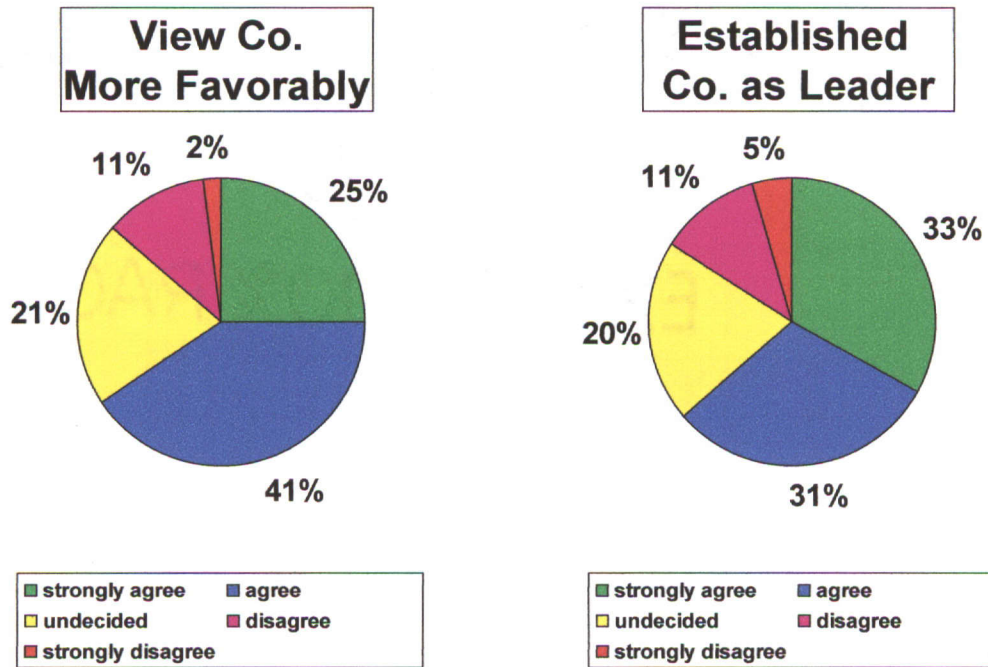
Both quantitative and qualitative study results provided data to either substantiate or dispute the surmised hypotheses.

**H1 More than 50 percent of customers surveyed who attended this event had a favorable perception of the company as a result of attending the event.**

To determine support for this hypothesis, the researcher stratified the research data specifically to customers to understand if they view the company more favorably as a result of attending the event (Question 18) and if, by holding this event for many years, the company helped establish a leading position in their industry (Question 19). Since 66 percent of customers said they view the company more favorably as result of attending the event and 64 percent thought this event establishes the company as an industry leader, the hypothesis is supported. (See the chart below.) Plus 78 percent agreed that they have a closer personal relationship with the company's people as a result of attending (Question 13 and 14), which should additionally influence a positive perception.

Figure 25

Customer who view co. favorably and establish them as leader

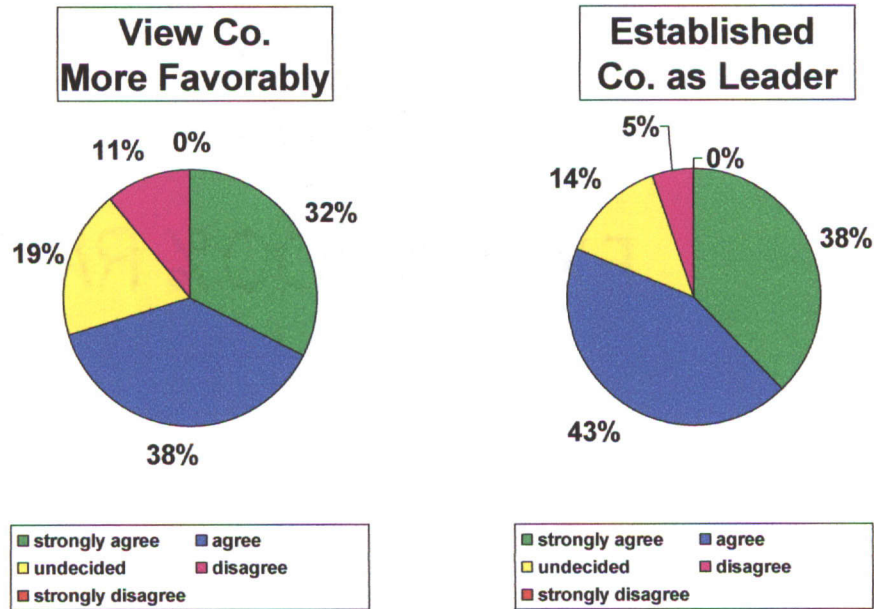


**H2 More than 50 percent of suppliers who attended this event had a more favorable perception of the company as a result of attending the event.**

Responses to the same questions were examined yet with stratified data specific to suppliers to confirm this hypothesis. Since 70 percent of suppliers viewed the company more favorably and 71 percent thought the event established the company as an industry leader, the hypothesis is supported. (See the chart below.) Plus 92 percent agreed they have a closer relationship with the company's people as a result.

Figure 26

Suppliers who view company favorably and establish them as leader



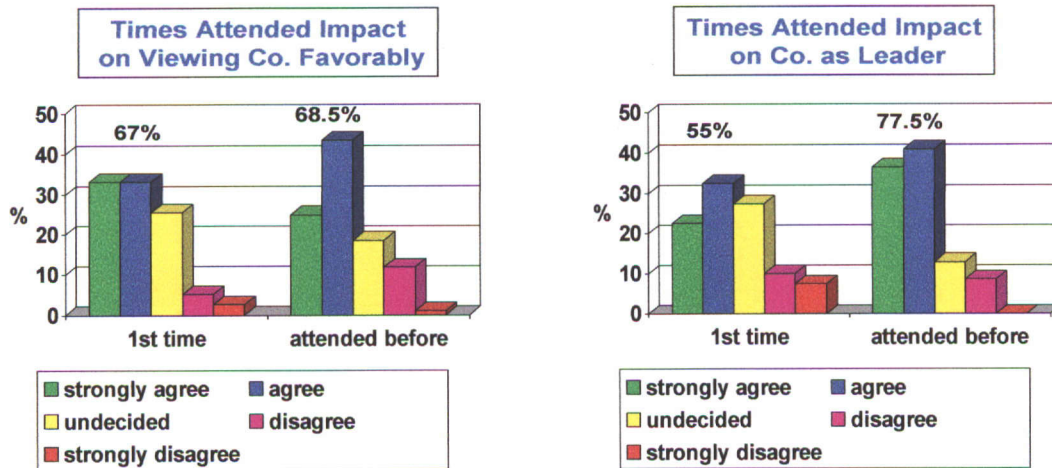
**H3 More than 50 percent of people who attended the event in previous years were impacted less favorably by the event than people who attended for the first time.**

To confirm this hypothesis the researcher looked at data for Question 18 and 19, comparing the responses of first time attendees to repeat attendees.



Figure 27

Repeat attendees view company favorably and establish them as leader



The chart shows that 67 percent of first time attendees agreed or strongly agreed that they view the company more favorably as a result of attending the event, while 68.5 percent of those who attended at least once before agreed or strongly agreed. Thus, the hypothesis is unsupported. In fact, in comparing first timers and previous attendees in the area of impact of this event on the company’s leadership position in the industry, previous attendees out-ranked first timers by 22.5 percent in agreeing or strongly agreeing.

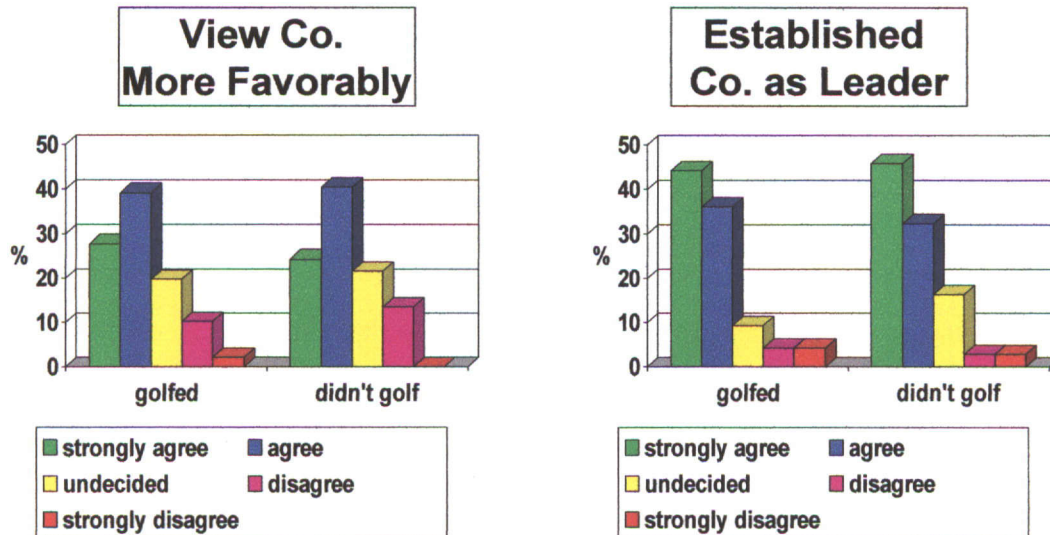
**H4 More than 50 percent of those who did not golf and could not participate in the full day’s events were impacted less favorably by the event than those who could participate in the entire event.**

Comparing the charts below, very subtle differences exist between the responses of golfers and non-golfers in both viewing the company more favorably and viewing the company as an industry leader as a result of this event. The hypothesis is therefore unsupported. In addition, a similar percent of golfers (almost 84 percent) and non-golfers

(about 79 percent) agreed they had a better relationship with the company's people as a result of attending, which is within the margin of error.

Figure 28

Golfers who view company favorably and establish them as leader



### Research Questions

The researcher also explored the following research questions:

**RQ1 What factors of the event most influenced customers and suppliers satisfaction with the event?**

Survey Question 12 best summarized attendees' responses ranking the following as their top five key event success factors.

1. Networking opportunities
2. Smooth execution
3. Food/Beverages
4. Turn out/Attendance
5. Weather

The focus group confirmed that weather was of utmost importance, since it was the first thing mentioned when participants were asked what they liked most about the event. Communicating in a more relaxed atmosphere was also discussed.

Although other case studies have shown similar results including weather in the top five elements of key event success factors (Stewart 1993), this should raise concern for the distributor, since it has no control over the weather on the day of the event. Currently no formal plan for a rain day has been enacted. This coincides with smooth execution to ensure that a rain day goes as smoothly as a good weather day.

### **RQ2 What factors of the event brought attendees the least satisfaction?**

Consistent in both survey comments and focus group dialogue, complaints focused on the slowness of the golf round and the seating at dinner. Both customers and suppliers raised these issues. Problems with the service providers, specifically the masseuse and fortune teller, also surfaced both in the survey and during the conference call. It became clear that these aspects need to be revamped to further improve the success of this event and provide a more pleasant attendee experience.

### **RQ3 What suggestions did attendees have for future events?**

Most suggestions made came in the form of survey comments. Three suggestions struck the researcher as warranting immediate change. They appeared fairly easy to accomplish and should prove most impactful. A buffet-style dinner would preserve the social aspect of the event keeping the crowd in motion and allowing attendees more of the networking interaction that they enjoy. Eliminating the hole-in-one and putting

contests in the beginning because of time constraints and potential attendee embarrassment is also fairly simple, alleviating some scheduling issues and preventing attendees from feeling uncomfortable. Lastly, exhibiting more awareness of and appreciation for supplier contributions is essential to maintaining and growing the event's funding level.

#### **RQ4 What compelled people to attend the event?**

Since developing relationships with the company's people and other industry contacts were the top two reasons to attend, respectively, the company needs to continue to facilitate this. It proves that the channel of the special event provides the appropriate forum to achieve results and is worthy of continuation.

#### **Event Goals**

Lastly, the researcher explored whether or not the company's goals for having the event were achieved.

#### **To strengthen customer and supplier relationships**

Seventy-eight percent of customers and 92 percent of suppliers agreed that they have a closer relationship with the company's employees as a result of attending the event. Comments from both the surveys and the focus group indicated that the company people do a good job of working the crowd and attending to guests' needs. The event clearly achieves this goal.

**To gain the perception of the distributor as the dominant player in the marketplace**

Although measurable goals were not set as to the number of people who should agree with this statement for the goal to be achieved, the researcher asserts that with 64 percent of customers in agreement and 71 percent of suppliers in agreement, this goal was met.

**To thank customers and suppliers for the business and support they have given the company over the past year**

Since 87 percent of customers agreed, it is difficult to dispute that this goal has been accomplished. Although a smaller number of suppliers (65 percent) agreed, the fact that suppliers helped sponsor this event may impact whether they truly felt thanked. This goal was geared more towards showing appreciation to suppliers for their support and more towards thanking customer for their business.

Having achieved all three goals for the event, the company event committee may want to assess what impact they would like the event to have in the future and consider redefining the event's goals to continue to reap the most return.

**The Researcher's Suggestions**

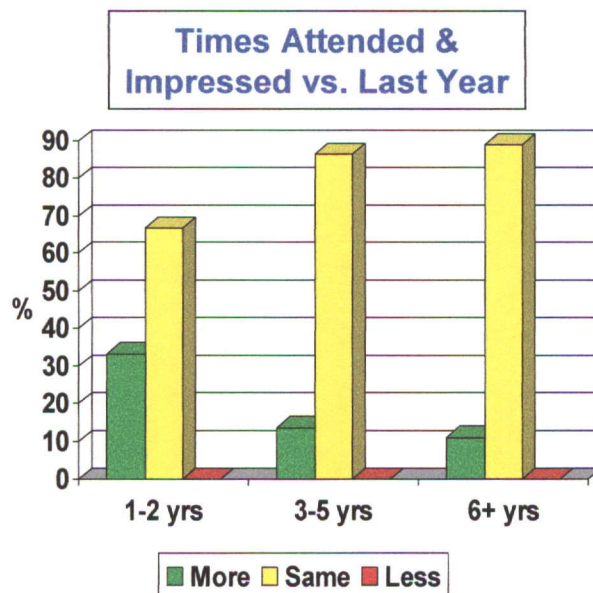
As a result of the data collection and interpretation, the researcher suggested the company take a fresh approach to the event and look at some ideas and alternatives based on the customer and supplier feedback. The eight areas of change are as follows.

## #1 Create the Unexpected

The event planners should choose a theme and then reflect that theme throughout different aspects of the event, such as invitations, decorations, give-aways, etc. This approach would prevent the event from becoming stale by building more anticipation toward the unveiling of the event's theme and by giving guests something to look forward to each year. One customer said it clearly in the survey, "Needs to be changed! Every year the same format – needs change to keep the excitement level high."

The research data also shows that 70 percent of attendees have experienced the event before and 53 percent have done so at least three times. As exhibited in the chart below, as guests attend the event more and more times, those who said they were more impressed by the event in 2004 than in the previous year steadily declines; and those who said they were impressed "about the same" increases.

Figure 29



## **#2 Speeding Up the Golf Round**

Planners should explore options for minimizing the length of the golf round. Perhaps considering a change in venue based on capacity may better accommodate the group size. The need for a new facility is also reinforced by comments about attendance size and dinner seating being too crowded. Elimination of the pre-round hole-in-one and putting contests to offer a staggered start would speed things up. Offering a 9-hole option could alleviate crowdedness and waiting on the course also. These could help golfers complete their round in time to enjoy the cocktail party in its entirety and may allow more focused time for the charity putt before or after the round.

## **#3 Service Providers: Masseur, Fortuneteller**

Issues with the service providers, specifically the masseuse and the fortuneteller, fell into two categories: awareness and staffing. In terms of awareness, many guests were unaware of or could not find the location of the masseuse or fortuneteller. The need for additional signage and careful attention to the placement of signs should be considered. One customer commented, "There are so many things such as massages and fortunetellers that are great but not promoted that day. People don't know where to find them. I don't think information is given to attendees."

The lack of participant knowledge may be attributed to the fact that these service providers are not advertised on the event invitation. Adding information about their presence within the invitation would increase awareness. Including information about the charity putt on the invite as well would cut down on the yelling and waving that those overseeing that portion of the event need to do to influence people to participate.

In terms of staff, results showed that only 10 percent of the attendees visited the fortuneteller, but she still had a long line. Some people even said they were waiting in line and the vendor walked out. Only 17.3 percent of attendees visited the masseuse, and she left with a long line still waiting as well. Additional massage therapists or fortunetellers may better support the size crowd the event draws.

Additionally, an increase in the company's staff dedicated to monitoring these activities could help. The company needs to make sure enough staff is present to monitor the lines, keep the service providers from spending too much or too little time with any guests and ensure time passes quickly for those in line by engaging in conversation with them. For those who attend only the evening festivities, it may be their first impression of the event; so making certain these activities flow smoothly is crucial. Following through with these changes will keep every part of the event "on par" and guarantee that attendees feel catered to in every aspect. It will also make certain that money spent on this portion of the day is worthwhile or it should be spent on something else.

#### **#4 Charity Putt**

The event includes a charity putting contest in which the money raised gets donated to Big Brothers Big Sisters each year. Although the current charity is a worthy cause, it may prove beneficial to consider a charity applicable to the company's business, such as dedicating a scholarship for engineering or sponsoring educational programs in the sciences. Supporting a cause that helps the industry locally should attain optimal attendee alignment with the charity. A relevant cause may also provide an opportunity to create further company awareness in the community through print media.



An attendee suggestion to use a credit card machine for payment at the putting event is also valid. This would give people another means of payment and an opportunity to get a receipt. The putt would probably receive more participants and more sizeable donations as a result.

### **#5 Reinforcing the Image**

Placing articles about local charity work or a relevant theme in company publications, local papers or trade journals after the event would establish a greater sphere of awareness about the company name and image in their community. It would create familiarity for recruiting outside the industry, show the good will from a local business and prove the company's commitment to relevant issues. In addition, a third party endorsement from the media helps enforce an image without seeming boastful.

The company has a marketing communication department corporately that is looking for assistance in getting newsworthy stories for publication, so working on articles would align with their corporate charter and extend the life of the event beyond the day it occurs. In addition, this resonates with comments that Joe Marconi made. "Think of your image in media choices...Every exposure should be in a place that helps reflect the image you are seeking to present" (p. 214).

### **#6 Supplier Relationships**

Planners should work on improved relations with suppliers as sponsors. Some recommendations to help facilitate that are as follows.

- Set more clear expectations up front for number of people from their organizations who can attend based on their contributions.
- Provide status or recognition for larger contributors, potentially creating sponsorship levels.
- Share the survey and focus group research data to prove the ROI from their sponsorship contributions.
- Solicit their post-event feedback.

Suppliers' comments supported the need for improved relations. One stated, "I was surprised that customers and even some high-level personnel were not aware that manufacturers such as my company are major contributors to the financing of this event annually." In reference to how invitations are handled, another supplier called it "strong-arming by the (company) people." Improving sponsor relations will foster more supplier buy-in and maintain a more positive perception about the Appreciation Day. In turn, the customers should have a more positive experience at the event, making it even more beneficial to the distributor.

### **#7 The Back-up Plan!**

Event planners should devote time to formulating a full, detailed back-up plan. Then, they should make attendees aware of it, so guests have proper expectations in the event of rain. The first thing mentioned during the focus group when asked about what makes the day successful was "Good weather!" The planning and attention to detail paid by event planners were mentioned repeatedly as key in the event's success also. One customer said, "Continue with the level of preparation and attention to detail. Should

assure future success.” The same should hold true for back-up plan. A day of rain with no plan could prove disastrous. Planning for inclement weather would help maintain an equally positive outcome in the event of rain, prevent potential money lost if the weather did not cooperate and thwart loss of the positive event perception captured within the research.

## **#8 Ongoing Evaluation**

While the concept of evaluative research is still fresh in the minds of both the distributor people and event attendees, the opportunity is created to continue collection of feedback each year. Contributing suppliers should be approached after future events to give their input. An email to either top suppliers or the contribution contact of each sponsor organization for a “Suggestion Box” type evaluation should prove useful. Especially if the researcher’s suggestions are implemented, the company will need to affirm guests’ reactions to those changes. The event staff could act as active observers during the event each year and make notes on suggestions or changes for next year, based on what they perceived.

Overall, the electronic component distributor did a fantastic job on its event. The response rate from both customers and suppliers proved their loyalty and the comments of appreciation showed that the relationship benefits are mutual. Now the distributor has more than just a “gut feel” about the outcome of the event. Proof is in the research and the feedback of their attendees. They can now use this research to support event changes, to gain corporate buy-in for additional event funding and to reconsider the event’s goals.

Additional research could be completed to further examine this event. A study replicating these research methods after changes in the Appreciation Day occur and comparing those results to the 2004 research results would prove interesting. A comparative study using both pre-event and post-event surveys would better gauge the direct impact of the special event on attendees' perceptions, particularly in the case of first time attendees. It may also be interesting to see if results would be similar from two companies with similar events from other industries, since this company does not have a competitor with a closely similar event.

Finally, this research exhibits the effect of public relations efforts in working to achieve a company's strategic goals. It provides comparative research from which PR practitioners can draw in planning the elements of their own events and considering the impact they are trying to achieve on their target publics. Data may also act as a case study to substantiate their special event budgets and to convey the role of these type events in influencing public perception. It emphasizes the importance of evaluative research and will hopefully encourage other practitioners to perform similar research for their organizations.

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## **Appendices**



## Appendix A: Pen and Paper Survey Instrument

**Please answer ALL questions as honestly and completely as possible. Remember your responses will be kept anonymous.**

*Please circle the answer that is most applicable to you.*

1. Which best fits your job title or description?  

Purchasing/Materials Manager	Buyer/Planner	Engineering Manager
Executive Management	Engineer	Manufacturer's Rep
Manufacturer Direct Employee	Other _____	
2. How many years have you been dealing with the company?  

<input type="checkbox"/> <2	<input type="checkbox"/> 2-5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6-10	<input type="checkbox"/> 11-15	<input type="checkbox"/> 16-20	<input type="checkbox"/> 20+
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3. What is your gender?  

<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Male
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4. What is your age range?  

<input type="checkbox"/> 21-30	<input type="checkbox"/> 31-40	<input type="checkbox"/> 41-50	<input type="checkbox"/> 51-60	<input type="checkbox"/> 61-65	<input type="checkbox"/> 65+
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5. Have you attended the Appreciation Day previous to the 2004 event?  

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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5A. *If yes, how many times have you attended in the past?*  

<input type="checkbox"/> 1-2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3-5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6+
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5B. *How impressed were you this year vs. past years?*  

<input type="checkbox"/> More	<input type="checkbox"/> Less	<input type="checkbox"/> About the Same
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Why? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you think the time of year the event is held is appropriate?  

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you like that this event is held the same day each year—the Thursday before Memorial Day?  

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

*Please rank from 1 to 6 (1 being the most important.)*

8. I attended the Appreciation Day because:  
 I wanted to spend time forming stronger relationships with the company's people.  
 I wanted to better understand the company.  
 I wanted to work on my golf game.  
 I wanted my company contacts to better understand me and my company's needs.  
 I needed a day away from the office.  
 I wanted to spend time forging better relationships with other industry contacts.  
 Other (*Please list.*) \_\_\_\_\_
9. Have you attended similar events by other companies in the industry?  

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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9A. *If yes, whose event did you attend? (Please list.)* \_\_\_\_\_  
 9B. *What did you like about their event?* \_\_\_\_\_

*Check all that apply.*

10. Which of the following did you participate in or visit with during the day's events?  

<input type="checkbox"/> Golf	<input type="checkbox"/> Golf Contests (i.e. Charity Putt, Closest to the Pin, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Dinner/Reception	<input type="checkbox"/> Seated-chair masseuse
<input type="checkbox"/> Fortuneteller	<input type="checkbox"/> Magician

*If you played golf during the event, please skip to #12.*

11. If you did **NOT** golf during the event, what reason **best** describes why?

- I do not golf.
- I was unable to leave the office for the day due to workload.
- I was unable to leave the office, because others in my department were golfing.
- Other (Please list.) \_\_\_\_\_

*Please rank your top 3 from 1 to 3 (1 being the most important.)*

12. Which of the following do you think are most important to the event's success?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decorations              | <input type="checkbox"/> Give-aways shirts, golf paraphernalia, etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food/Beverages           | <input type="checkbox"/> Door prizes/golf prizes                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Golf                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Smooth execution of the day's events        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Turn out/Attendance      | <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation/Attention to details            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weather                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Magician, masseuse, fortune teller          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Networking opportunities | <input type="checkbox"/> Musical entertainment                       |

*Please rate the following on a scale 1 to 5.*

*(1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=undecided, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree)*

13. I feel that I have a closer personal relationship with contacts at the company as a result of attending this event.

1      2      3      4      5

*If you are a customer, please answer #14, if not skip to #15.*

14. I feel that I have closer personal relationships with suppliers and/or manufacturers' representatives as a result of attending the event.

1      2      3      4      5

*If you are a supplier/manufacturer's rep, please answer #15, if not skip to #16.*

15. I feel that I have a closer relationship with customers as a result of attending the event.

1      2      3      4      5

16. I feel the event is valuable enough to warrant taking time out of regular business hours to participate.

1      2      3      4      5

17. I feel that I better understand the company's charter as a company as a result of attending this event.

1      2      3      4      5

18. I view Avnet more favorably as a company as a result of attending this event.

1      2      3      4      5

19. As a result of holding this event for many years, I think the company has helped establish a leading position in the industry.

1      2      3      4      5

20. I feel Avnet hosts this event to thank me for my business and support.

1      2      3      4      5

21. What changes or suggestions do you have for future Appreciation Days that you think may enhance or improve the event?

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**THANK YOU!**

## **Appendix B: Focus Group Research Instrument**

### **Purpose of the Focus Groups**

The researcher will conduct a focus group based annual Appreciation Day for 2004 and attendees impression of the event. The researcher will be gathering information as it relates to:

1. What specific components of the event do attendees like or value and why?
2. What specific components of the event do attendees dislike or see as not valuable and why?
3. What suggestions do attendees have to improve or enhance future events?
4. How has the event itself affected your impression of the company as a company/partner?

### **Structure of the Focus Groups**

One focus group panel will be held.

- One will contain 10-12 suppliers and customers.
- The group will have one moderator to keep the identity of the researcher anonymous.
- The focus groups will be tape recorded, so that researcher will be able to listen without being concerned about notes. (The consent forms for this research will include consent for audio taping of the focus groups.)
- The focus group will be approximately one hour in length.
- At the end of each focus group the moderator and the researcher will meet, once the researcher has been able to review the audiotape, to discuss key findings revealed during the group discussions.
- Focus group participants were recruited in the mailing with the survey. All those who volunteered were asked to partake.
- All participants in the focus groups will receive a \$20 gift certificate good at any AMC Theater.