

## **Event Planning: A Strategic Key for Uniqueness**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Events are an important aspect of popular culture. Particularly for corporations, event management is a tool for building a strong relationships between corporate and its publics. Planning an event is considered by the managers of the company as an improvement strategy regarding the corporates image and reputation. This study will put forward how events as a competitive advantage creates uniqueness for corporations. Nevertheless this study brings forward the features of event planning and the importance of events in the development of an area. The case which analysed in this study is one of the Turkish corporation in health industry named İstanbul Cerrahi Sağlık Grubu. This corporation's product- Ageless Clinic- host a special event called Key Party in February 2016. This event was planned and managed by a communication agency; Grandcarre İletişim ve Organizasyon. This case study was employed to analyse Key Party's event planning steps based on Getz (2005) adopted by Bowdin et. al, event planning function.*

**Keywords:** *Event planning, Event management, Public relations*

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### **I. Introduction**

Planning and managing an event is a very important tool for building a strong relationships between corporate and its publics. Therefore, event management is a part of the strategic planning for public relations. The advantages that an event provide is not only economic but also it enhance the reputation and image of the corporation. However, these advantages are not limited with the interest of corporations. The special event like festivals, children events, exhibitions, musical events etc. adds values in terms of cultural and social development of the society. Hence event management is one of the valuable tool for marketing, advertising and public relations in recent years.

When considering an event planning there are lots of variables to think and deal with by the organizers and the managers of the corporations. The literature that has been written on the practice of event management is usually related to the industry as a whole. It is a practical understanding which is adopted mostly focusing on planning and operation. Authors such as O'Toole, Allen, McDonnell and Harris in Australia; Van Kirk, Catherwood, Getz and Goldblatt in the US; and Hall from New Zealand, take part in, in terms of the development discipline and the event management courses in higher education especially in Australia, the US and the UK.[1]

Today, events are central to our culture as perhaps never before. Increases in leisure time and discretionary spending have led to a proliferation of public events, celebrations and entertainment. Governments now support and promote events as part of their strategies for economic development, nation building and destination marketing. Corporations and businesses embrace events as key elements in their marketing and communication strategies. Both in academic world and private sector, event and event management became one of the favorite concept which public relations professionals utilize most as a part for strategic planning. Events that corporations implement for their public relations practices gain benefits both to reach their key publics and to accomplish their mission and vision. Because of the complex system of planning, implementing and evaluating an event, corporations cannot plan events on their own. Thus, corporations need external professional services.

### **II. Literature Review**

There are variety of definitions about event and event management in literature. Berridge emphasizes that it is important to clarify 'what we call an event?'. Donald Getz and J.J. Goldblatt made the two of the earliest academic attempts to define events in the early 1990s, that define an event such as being 'unique', 'one-off', 'special' and 'beyond everyday experience', therefore without delay event differs from other more routine activities such as work. The idea of an event is used to set them apart from other activities in life and being a special moment in time in recurring feature. Getz (1991) describes event as *an opportunity for leisure, social or cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experience.*[2] Salem et. al states that; Getz (1997) points out that 'many events suffer from a "product orientation" that is, they try to sell their event with little or no regard for what potential customers need, want, and will pay for'. [3] Event is not just a product or service presentation to its publics, it is also corporates activities to create a positive image and reputation.

There are many other definitions in dictionaries and other texts with similar descriptions. The Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX) Industry Glossary of terms (CIC, 2003) explains an event as, 'An organized occasion such as a meeting, convention, exhibition, special event, gala dinner, etc.', An event is often a combination of related terms Getz (2005) points out that events are temporary to apply a principle and states that 'every such event is unique stemming from the blend of management, program, setting and people'. [4] The common point of all definitions is that events need to be managed and planned properly to achieve goals and objectives.

According to O'Toole and Mikolaitis; the international corporate event market is the fastest-growing field in the event industry. From 1994 to 1999, The George Washington University International Special Events Society profile of event management (a biennial study) approved that the most frequently produced events are those who are in the corporate sector. Every day, human resources development, sport and athletic, marketing, trade shows, training and other corporate events are to be carried out all around the world. The corporate event management industry has exploded according to the corporations exporting their products and services to global markets. So, a formalized project management process is needed for effective coordination because of the ever-increasing complexity and concurrency of events. Related to this, the successful corporate event manager must have the knowledge of formal and informal event practices and the processes applied by corporations throughout the world. [5] The event market is growing all over the world by the help of growing technology. Many different and creative events are done and it helps for corporations known by their potential target audiences.

Tum (et al) emphasizes that; the thing that makes allevents special and creates a challenge for the manager is their 'uniqueness'. There are four different characteristics of events that are important for the event organizers are:

1. Size and volume of output
2. Complexity and variety of services/products offered to the consumer
3. Uncertainty of numbers attending, cost, time schedule and technical requirements
4. Interaction with the consumer, and degree of consumer and customer contact. [6] Furthermore; events are planned according to their budget in terms of local or major. Budget is a basic decision to be made at the beginning of planning process. There are no limits for building and creating an event, so budget is the focus point to make an event 'uniqueness'.

According to Wall et. al, events have a significant role in popular culture. For example, in 1969 Wood-Stock Music and Art Fair, nearly 500,000 people gathered for three days is still famous all around the world. The other well-known examples are; The American Oscars, the film festivals in Cannes and The British Academy of Film and Television Arts (see, Jeacle, 2014), Roskilde music festival in Denmark and the summer and winter Olympic games. These events are not only highly complex and unpredictable but also varying in size and complexity (Shone and Parry, 2004). Events organizations are often expressed between the number of people attending the event and to those who take part before and after the event. [7]

Salem et. al states that; the aims of events are usually classified into specific objectives- all steps try to achieve the aim of the event so, event objectives ideally should be SMART.

Specific to the event

Measurable quantitatively

Agreed (or achievable) by those involved

Realistic (or relevant) to the resources available

Timed around the event schedule.

SMART objectives, helps to specify and evaluate the event by ticket sales, donations, subsidies or cash flow, number of local or international visitors, or levels of investment (e.g. for building a new stadium, specifying volumes of income or profit, advertising revenue, merchandising sales and sponsorship. [8] Events differ from each other by their participants, time schedule and aims etc.. So, events have to be measurable to evaluate by some criterias. Thus, SMART criterias make it possible to measure and achieve aim and goals.

Special events are the ones that public relations professionals mostly use. Golblatt emphasizes; R.Jani states that *aspecial event isthat which different from a normal day of living. Special events as a unique moment in time celebrated with ceremony and ritual to satisfy specific needs.* [9] Special events are planned and created for customers special requests. According to Shone and Parry; special events are categorized into four groups. These are;

-Leisure events: Leisure, sport, recreation

-Cultural Events: Ceremonial, sacred, heritage, art, folklore

-Organizational Events: Commercial, politicalcharitable, sales

- Personal Events: Weddings, birthdays, anniversaries.

Special events come from those non-routine occasions which have cultural, organizational, leisure or personal objectives different from daily life activities and whose aim is to celebrate, enlighten, challenge or entertain experience of a group of people. [10]

According to Masterman; for successful communication, PR techniques is not without cost, they are nevertheless often a less expensive alternative to many of the others that exist in the event manager's arsenal and they also carry the highest level of credibility. Public relations has two functions; one is that supporting marketing in the form of promotion and the other one is that it is the mean that disseminate non-promotional information to publics that are key to the organization. PR has much more role than supporting the market push, it also manages communications with all those individuals, groups and organizations that are considered an important component for applying a successful event, otherwise known as target publics. These may include communications concerned with the changing of opinion or provision of information that are targeted at local pressure groups, financial institutions, community leaders and event participants.

An event's publics could consist of any of the following:

- Customers: Ticket and corporate buyers.
- Participants: Competitors, celebrities, performers and acts.
- Sponsors: Fee paying and supply-in-kind.
- Partners: In organization, promotion and funding.
- Financial providers: Shareholders, investors and lenders.
- Suppliers: Event equipment, merchandise and service providers.
- Staff: Permanent, temporary, sub-contracted and voluntary.
- Community: Local operating environments and pressure groups. [11]

Planned events are made with specific goals in mind by conscious human design, created by organizations with many stakeholders, It is extensively the event management or business domain that focuses on management systems, transforming processes, mobilizing resources and professionalism. As the events are means towards an end (e.g., political benefits, place marketing profit, celebration, branding) one must consider carefully assessing the goals and taking multi-stakeholders approach to answer the 'why?' question. [12]

Event management is known as the way in which an organization deals with events. It may include the company or organizations, ownership of tools and processes, standards and event-handling procedures, organizations objectives for managing events, critical success factors, assigned roles and responsibilities. The focus of event management is the linkages between different departments within the organizations required to handle events and getting information. [13] Event management is making balance between the flowing information and the ability of applying it successfully to the event.

When a person or organization starts to create an event, the critical decision here is that finding the proper answers to these questions: who are going to take part in the event and are these people appropriate for the job? So task allocation has to be done successively in order to match people who will do the tasks.

Cunningham states that the necessity to produce a team effort is one of the most exciting aspects of event management. Events require a facilitator to guide the process of sharing the knowledge between members. Furthermore, the event manager is in charge of facilitating the processes of event which are found within the collaborative effort of planning and implementing an event, where all members of the group need to feel equally a part of the team effort. The role of the event manager as a facilitator is established in the development phase of the planning model. [14] Event teams need to work in a harmony with their team leader and with each other during the event process. A good team leader makes even planning process easier, creates synergy and make team members feel as they are being supported.

### **III. Research Methodology**

The aim of this study is to examine and analyse 'Key Party' which was organized by Grandcarre İletişim ve Organizasyon on February 2016 for their client İstanbul Cerrahi Sağlık Grubu. Key Party is analysed by case study method which is based on Getz's (2005) event planning function model, adopted by Bowdin et al.

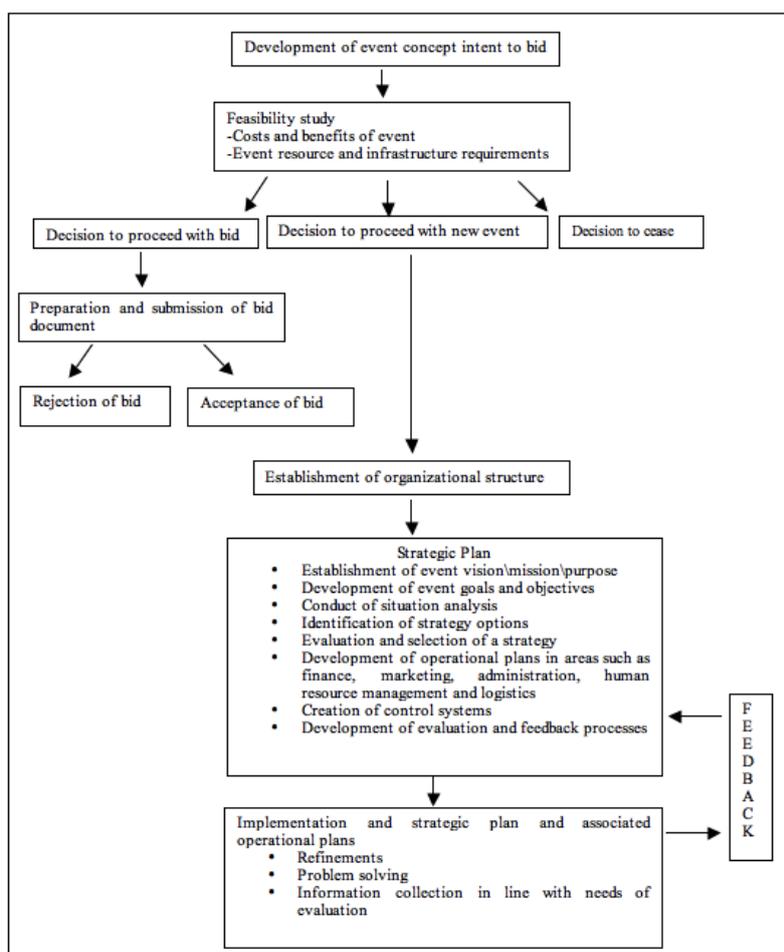
İstanbul Cerrahi Sağlık Grubu was founded in 1994 by 3 physicians and 5 entrepreneurs. It continued to provide service in Nişantaşı which is one of the high-profile town of İstanbul. İstanbul Cerrahi provides healthcare services for the patients in every field and department of the medicine and adopts the principle of providing continuous healthcare services for the patients coming from abroad. İstanbul Cerrahi has a unique product called "Ageless Clinic". Ageless Clinic is one of the important invest that İstanbul Cerrahi make. It is a boutique and unique health clinic which provide personalized health services for the upscale clients. [15]

Grandcarre is one of the communication agencies that has a broad experience in organizing events, entertainment and public relations in İstanbul. The agency was established by two creative and successful communication professionals in 2010. They provide services for their client such as brand management, media relations, event planning, social responsibility, crisis management evaluation and reporting, marketing strategy, social media relations, product launch, corporate communication etc. [16]

A case study describes and analyses an organization, a person or an event in detail. How much detail or information is needed to the researcher depends on the problem and the data available. Public relations case studies are often seen as analogous to business case studies, such as published by the Harvard School of

Business. When researching a case study other qualitative methods may also be employed, particularly interviewing and in some instances focus groups and participant-observation; the case study is an obvious extension of secondary research. In addition, case studies often include quantitative data obtained from studies reported in various documents or from secondary research. [17]

According to Bowdin et.al [18]; the strategic event planning process is a model which explains the event planning process from the first step. It depends on if the event is conducted for the first time or is it a pre-existing event. If the answer is that the event is planning for the first time, so managers may need to work through the broad concept of the event with key stakeholders and then undertake a feasibility study. In the case of a pre-existing event and its opening to the bidding process an initial decision needs to be made as to whether (after a preliminary investigation) it is worthwhile making a bid or proposal. If the answer is 'yes', before preparing a formal bid, a more detailed feasibility study might be conducted to identify such things as the costs and benefits associated with hosting. In the case of a bid or proposal is prepared and it is successful, then detailed event planning would start.



The strategic event planning process

Source: Bowdin et. al, adapted from Getz (2005) [19]

According to the model; the event prepared by Grandcarre İletişim ve Organizasyon is an organization designed to announce Ageless Clinic, as a distinctive and unique clinic, which has recently been opened within the body of İstanbul Cerrahi Sağlık Grubu which the company has been working with for a year. This event which is a special event within the scope of event types, is also categorized as an organizational event. It has been reviewed as follows according to Getz's model and Bowdin et al:

#### Development of event concept intent to bid and feasibility study:

İstanbul Cerrahi Sağlık Grubu decided to organise an event within PR practices that are going to be conducted within the frame of pre-launching for the Ageless Clinic which they recently founded. Having conveyed this decision to Grandcarre İletişim ve Organizasyon, the Corporation requested from them to organize a special event taking the existing target audience of the clinic in to the consideration. This event which took place in the

yearly strategy presentation the Agency prepared for the corporation was planned as the last event for the second half of 2015. The corporation trusted all the details such as the concept, creativeness and uniqueness of the event to the agency. The second agency presentation was made where subjects such as the place, cost and how the budget of this event would be met were discussed. Having confirmed the event following the presentation of the bidding to the board of directors, it moved onto to implementation stage for the strategic planning. With the joint decision of the client and the agency, the date of the event which had been planned as the last event of 2015 was changed to the first event of 2016 and it was held in the evening of February 8.

**Establishment of organizational structure:**

The agency worked with a team of 20 people for the pre-launching event. And 6 people were assigned to the event team where two founders of Grandcarre were the event managers, and it was coordinated by a director. Task allocation was determined according to the interests and the skills of individuals, and besides the whole team being subordinated by the director, they personally met the executives for all operations conducted before, during and after the event because of the substantial structure and personal communication of the agency with their clients that existed since the day it was founded. During the event, an average of 10 emails was sent and many phone calls were made daily.

**Strategic plan:**

Ageless Clinic is a clinic that aims to provide services on aging in a healthy way with its philosophy of offering exclusive services and being 'ageless' as its name suggests. The event was decided to be creative and unique having the services, target audience and the philosophy of the clinic into the consideration. Within this scope, the event concept was determined as a 'key party'. A two month preparation period was spent for the party.

Key party is an event which includes a special story in itself. It was developed upon the key concept, which was designed exclusively for individuals attending to invitations and parties held at homes in 1800s during when entertainment venues did not exist. This event where elite guests were invited to a specific special place or a house and they entered inside using the key that belonged to them and joined to the fun, was adapted to our day and the concepts of key and agelessness were combined. In compliance to the purpose, Istanbul Klein was determined as the place. Besides recently being the most popular entertainment venue in Istanbul, Klein was one of the movie theatres of the early republic period. Therefore, timelessness of the setting matches up with the services offered to its clients by the clinic. The architecture of that period reflected in the place, the carpets and fabrics designed for this special day highlighted the concept of agelessness.

According to the data from the SWOT analysis they had since they have been working with the corporation for a year, the corporation's aspects of being new and distinctive were identified as an opportunity and because being founded under a corporation operating in healthcare was one of its strong suits, this was taken into account in this event. According to the SWOT analysis, the target audience was identified as A+, A, B+ and B, with people over 30. It was assumed that 200 guest would come. However, 348 guest attended the party.

İstanbul Cerrahi Sağlık Grubu used growth strategy at the stage of identification of strategy options for prelaunch of the clinic in order to develop its existing service sector and to access a wider audience of people. *Growth can be expressed as more revenue, more event components, more participants or consumers, or a bigger share of the event market.* [20] It was tried to attract the attention of the media, not just that of the potential customers.

At strategy evaluation and selection stage consisting of 'appropriateness/suitability', 'feasibility' and 'acceptability/desirability' components as suggested by Bowdin et. al., the keys were sent to the guests together with the invitation cards having the key concept applied in 1800s adapted to our day. The guests were able to get inside using the keys sent to them opening the door of the venue. The scent which is currently being used in and was designed exclusively for the clinic, was also used inside the venue in order to make the event unique and tangible. In addition to this, cheques had been given to the people that participated in the event upon their arrival. Aerial dance, one of the most popular shows recently, was staged in the event. Besides acrobats clothed according to corporate colors, a light in blue which is the corporate color of the Ageless Clinic was reflected on the clothes of the aerial dancer. In order to attract a wider audience of people and participants, 3 famous celebrities from Turkey hosted the event. Also, 2 DJs played at the event.

At the stage of development of operational plans in areas such as finance, marketing, administration, human resource management and logistics; the existing facilities of the corporation and the venue were used. In addition to this, a catering company was hired. The materials, decorations and equipment that were planned to be used at the event were supplied in compliance with the meeting held together with the finance department of the corporation. Since it was a clinic within the body of the corporation itself, no sponsorship was required. The crises that might be experienced during the event were predicted as guests forgetting their keys, media not showing the sufficient interest due to the fact that several other organizations were being held at the same evening and an action plan was in place accordingly. For guests who forgot their keys, they were given another key at the entrance of the venue and personal connections were utilised in case the media does not attend to the organization. One crisis was experienced before the event, it was noticed that the prints at the venue were not as

they planned to be. The agency that foreseen such an incident, received the venue at 17:00 for the organization that would start at 21:00, eliminated the crisis and gained the time required to change the dressings. And in feedback process, the event managers together with the executives of the corporation established a communication system in order to intervene every problem at once constantly via phone and emails. Finally, besides receiving RSVPs from the invitees, the contact information of the event managers was shared with them to get in touch directly.

#### **Implementation and strategic plan and associated operational plans:**

During and after the event, the participation of social media icons to the event was ensured in order to be talked about in the social media, then #beageless and #keyparty hashtags were used while sharing the messages. In order to start the event on time and to prevent potential crises, the venue was emptied 4 hours in advance. In order not to have any problems during the entrances and exits, a 3 phase entrance plan was designed. Necessities such as parking, valet and checkroom services were met by the venue. For the visibility of the brand in news that would take place in the media, the branding wall was prepared and a pit area was created for the press members to conduct interviews with the celebrities attending the event. The success of the event was assessed by the satisfaction level of the corporation and the agency, and with the number and satisfaction level of the attendees. Required assessments were made according to a number of different factors such as positive news and columns that took place in newspapers, shares in social media, numbers of retweets, and likes on Instagram. Although there is no media coverage data yet, since the event was held in February, a coverage worth one million dollars was targeted. The event also became the 'trend topic' on the social media in the evening of February 8. Negative reviews were not observed in any social media accounts, regarding the event. CEO and brand managers acknowledged their appreciations for the success and perfection of the event having contacted the agency personally after the event.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Event planning and management is an important part of strategic public relations management. Especially the corporations that understand the significance of strategic communications have been incorporating the event organizations into their annual activities over the last years. Due to the reasons such as the complex nature of events, personnel and time requirements to be employed for the event make it harder for the corporations to organize successful and effective events by themselves. The corporations receive assistance from outside sources (such as event management organizations, PR agencies, communication agencies etc.) in order to be able to plan and implement events in success, as one of the strategic tools of public relations. The corporations that apply this acquire a competitive advantage by creating a positive public perception via creative and unique practices.

The purpose of this study is to show that the corporations can prevent all kinds of crises and problem and be successful at reaching to their key target audiences when the planning stages required for the event management are applied in the right order and accurately. Within this context, the "Key Party" event that was organized for the pre-launching of "Ageless Clinic" of İstanbul Cerrahi Sağlık Grubu, in February 2016 was analysed based on the stages of strategic event planning process as suggested by Getz. The event plan prepared was reviewed in details at each stage.

Key Party differentiates itself from other events with implementations such as guests being able to enter into the venue using the keys given them with the invitation cards, usage of the scent exclusive to the clinic, placing the colors of the corporation all around the venue and giving the guests who arrived the advantage cheques for the clinic in order to make the event more tangible. Creative, distinctive and unique events make the event memorable for the target audience and make the corporations positively perceivable since this provides visibility. Also when the feedback phase among the strategic planning and planning implementation stages is implemented upon in a reliable way between the corporation and the agency, the event process is managed successfully and application of the strategic plan is ensured by intervening immediately in case of any problems.

As a conclusion, it is seen that, in an event that is organized in compliance with the strategic planning, the objectives defined from the very beginning can be achieved if a coherent and open communication is maintained between the corporation and the agency, the event has creative and unique aspects and if it reaches to its targeted audience.

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