

How Not to Miss a Corporate Anniversary (5 Tips)



Vern Associates (VAI) was founded in October 1994, incorporated the following January, and set about marking these 15th anniversaries in February 2009. And we made plans! Press releases, email notices, mailings—we even considered tchotchkes. In the end, we mailed a postcard and posted a few Tweets, but most of our ideas for marking and publicizing our good fortune and pleasure in making a go of our business came to naught due to the great levelers: budget, time, staffing, etc.

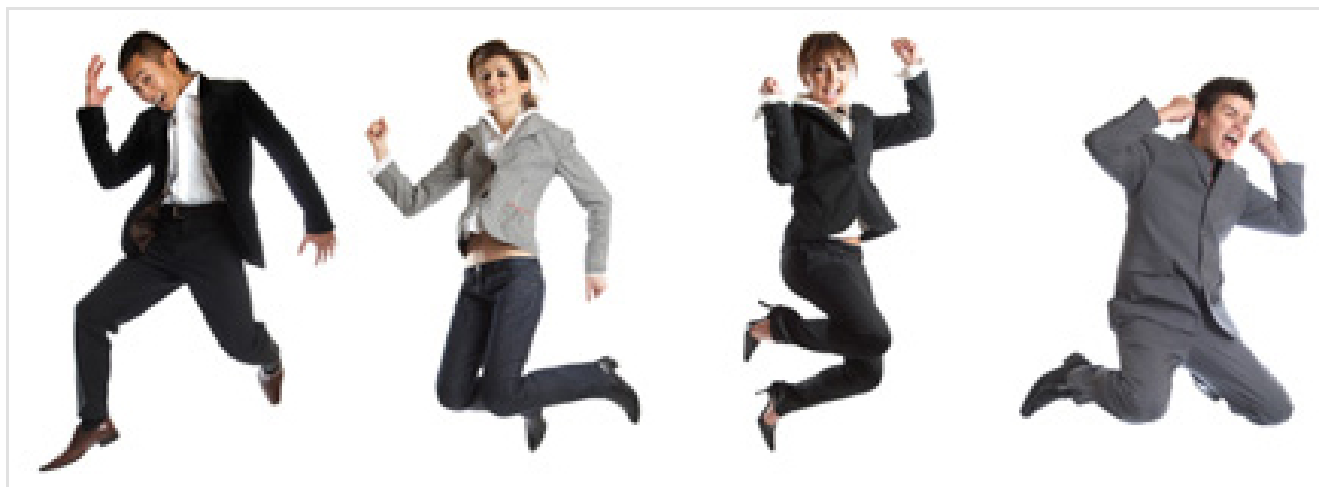
Therefore, based on our experiences and those of our clients, the following few tips about letting the world know you've attained a significant milestone may be helpful. They apply to just about any business, association, nonprofit organization, even independent contractor that wants to leverage an important day or year.

#1: Remember It

Talk show hosts and sitcom writers rely on cheesy (but apparently evergreen) one-liners about the guy who forgot his wedding anniversary. We nod knowingly and congratulate ourselves for never letting something this meaningful slip. But what about business milestones? Do you know when they occur(ed)? Have you ever thought to investigate? VAI does extensive research to find potential clients with upcoming anniversaries. In contacting their CEOs or marketing VPs, we have discovered that approximately one-third of these people did not even realize that their organization was close to turning a notable corner. Granted, taking special notice of a nice, round number of years in an organization's history may be a bit arbitrary, but letting the world know about such an attainment also presents a perfect opportunity to reflect on where you've been, how you got there, and where you are headed.

#2: Allow Sufficient Lead Time

Obvious? Yes, but also frequently overlooked until it is too late. I contend that the "Information Age" pace in which we are caught up has done a spectacular job of obscuring a cardinal truth: a—perhaps *the*—crucial ingredient in any strategy is timing. Devoting the necessary time to a project results in a better product, more accurate publication, or optimally effective campaign. It may seem to be possible to reach the goal in record time, is that a good idea when you factor in the creeping inaccuracy and slipshod design that will have serious consequences for the project's acceptance and influence? What about the exponential increase in cost that rush fees engender? Knowing when to make a beginning is the trick, which relies on the next tip.



#3: Hammer down the Scope at the Outset

Before defining and setting up the specific elements, it is crucial to settle on an appropriate scope for the celebration. Does the strategy entail a couple of simple notifications, or is a commemorative publication in order? Maybe a banquet is warranted, or would an employee picnic be more in keeping? It goes without saying

that every anniversary-specific strategy must determine what is most appropriate and cost-effective for the celebration. VAI has worked with clients that continued to add new pieces as they arose due to a progressive surge in organizational excitement and involvement as the date neared. Trouble was, corporate high spirits didn't consider budget overruns or time crunches. Technological innovation's marked benefits can't effectively shorten the time needed for most human-centric efforts—planning, research, writing, and the like.

#4: Honor the Past and Consider the Future

This is especially important when determining what will proceed from the anniversary that is of lasting value. While a lavish party is likely to leave fond memories for those who attend, a paperweight residing on employees' desks becomes a daily reminder. A broader-based memento such as a book not only marks the occasion. It also becomes an excellent source of information that will reach many people outside the organization. A book is also often seen as a metaphor for the permanence and substance exemplified by your company. Perhaps best of all, it will enjoy a long shelf life as a superlative tool for anyone devoted to the marketing and/or development functions.

#5: Get Help

Assuming that the elements in the anniversary strategy fall partially or entirely outside "business as usual," the means of accomplishing them require close, clear-headed consideration by everyone involved. Chances are, the dinner-dance will be catered and (with any luck) an extra-corporate orchestra hired. So what about the anniversary publication? Are any staff members equipped to write a book-length manuscript? Can they devote the requisite time on top of performing their usual work? It may be wiser to hire someone from outside, whose sole responsibility will be the research and writing needed to prepare the manuscript. Once it's written, what then? Is your staff set up to edit, design, lay out, and produce the final book?

As VAI discovered, even the most modest anniversary commemoration entails myriad considerations. Following these five tips at the outset will help the rest of these issues fall nicely into place.

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