Central Florida Region SCCA

Showcase Part 2-Improving From Lessons Learned

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Presentation Notes

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Welcome

**Slide 2**

To start, let’s review the reason we did this [read slide].

How many of you attended our presentation last year?

How many of you put on a Showcase of your own in the past year?

What we want to do this year is take you through how our Showcase evolved in its 2nd year of running. The changes that were made, the things we wanted to do, the things we did, the challenges we faced and the “flexibility” that we had in order to achieve another successful event.

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Daytona International Speedway the “World Center of Racing”

Last year we stated that we are inviting people to a main venue that holds races such as the Rolex 24 Hours and here we are again. This time people may remember our first event. Will people want to return? That is a real question. We had positive feedback so we are thinking, yes they will.

The spectator already has an expectation and we have to find a way to meet and exceed it because we are not IMSA, we are not NASCAR … we are the SCCA. We are a grassroots organization that is setting out to let people know that they can be part of the racing world.

In addition to the spectators we had a few special guests. Thanks to SCCA Chairman of the Board of Directors, Lee Hill, we had the honor of having SCCA President, Mike Cobb, and SCCA Dir. of Regional Development, Chris Robbins, not only attend but also participate in our Showcase events.

Hello pressure!

We looked back thru all of our materials and determined where we could improve. How we could do our marketing not only better but for less money? A lot less money, our budget was slashed big time. So, how can we reach the public thru all the free forms of media out there and some not-so-free to get people to our event?

We developed marketing via social media, flyers that people could print from our CFR website, and we had a few mentions from Grassroots Motorsports. Thanks to JG Pasterjack who runs a little Facebook Live and YouTube show every Wednesday night who mentioned us on their show several times because he was participating in the Solo portion of the event. “Come out and ride with me in the very same vette you see us building here on our show.” Major. Better than the money we put in radio advertising the previous year because we hit our target audience. To repay them we made sure they were also in our ads on the website and mentioned them wherever we could.

When I was working on the marketing material I realized what I was doing was inviting people for a fun day out at Daytona. Yet my intent was to get spectator to our event and be part of it. Not spectate. Get them out on a corner with a marshal, get them in a passenger seat with one of our drivers, do a Fan Walk to meet and talk with our grassroots club racers. The spark of conversation can be the key to open doors. They aren’t coming here to watch another race; they are here to become part of it. So I changed the spin and pushed that forward.

I mentioned this last year and its worth mentioning again, your guests are a moving piece of your event. Be prepared to walk them thru the event from start to finish. Once guests arrive, how were we going to corral them to get inside the event with little to any disruption to the event participants and the Track Staff? Daytona has tours that run every day and they ran both of our event days. We couldn’t have our spectators that were getting in for “free” and basically having free roam of the place disrupting the money making tour that DIS offers.

Last year we had everyone enter thru the same gate thinking signs for spectators and the racers prior knowledge of how things work at DIS would work. It didn’t. Signs were blocked by cars and trailers and people wandered about trying to find where they needed to be to get in. Racers were not happy with this and understandably so.

In 2018 we changed the entrance for Spectators to the entrance of Speedway Boulevard which is the main street in front of DIS. An electronic flashing construction sign let SCCA Racers and Event Guests know where to go to enter. This made parking easier, signing of the waiver easier and ensuring that guests were given the welcome and attention they deserved.

Again, with costs being a factor when I attended the Rolex I went walking around to see what facilities DIS had onsite that we could use for our Showcase. By doing this recon we were able to use the facility structures like Guest Booths, Media Center, etc. and that reduced our setup costs and the number of people needed.

Our Guest Booth staff was amazing. They welcomed the guests, gave them information and sent them thru the Turn 4 tunnel that alone makes people happy. You see the Turn 4 tunnel is an original tunnel of DIS. Right off the bat, they are being introduced to the speedway’s history. Once inside we had signage and parking attendants to guide our guests in and keep them separated from event participants.

Remember, you need to guide your guests to what they will be doing for the day. Last year we had a satellite image for an event map and that was not the best option. So while at IMSA races I looked at their event maps, shared them with the Showcase staff and we improved our Showcase map to something that they would be more familiar with. In order to save costs, the map was downloadable from our CFR website.

A money saving to is to think about what the guest will dispose of and see if there is another media form for it. There was and it worked.

[Bring up cfrscca.org website]

By using the tools, infrastructure, etc. already around you and looking at what others have done you can make what you do that much better. Overall we were starting to look and feel like a more professional event and that only brings forth better things for you and your Showcase staff.

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Now that we let you know what went on in the Showcase let’s talk about what went on with the staff. How did we get here?

Conference calls.

For the life of me I cannot figure out why I am not a good leader of the conference calls we had. At one point I was letting the team who consisted of the Regional Exec, our Contract Liaison with the track, the Paddock Marshall and all program chairs go in circles while I tried on the new clothes I had received from LeTote.com. While we may have thought an issue was dealt with and any questions answered, that wasn’t necessarily the case. More questions would get raised by people on the call. Your team will have good intentions. Your team will have opinions, some good and some bad. Your team will have passion. You as the leader will have to figure out how to allow for all that in under a reasonable amount of time anyone should spend on a conference call.

Conference Call Fan Walk Episode.

So we are on the phone discussing the Fan Walk, should we have it. I’m hearing arguments that we cannot have a dead track. That no one wants to see “our” cars. Fan Walks are only for the professional races. The Race Board Chair is fighting hard to have this happen. I’m pushing for it to happen but the bigger voices don’t want it to happen. What would you do?

If you are like me you remind people that this event is to try new things. That your cars and drivers are what and who you want the guests to mingle with. If you want someone to marshal give them a reason to do it. If you say no one wants to see your cars then why are they going to marshal your race?

Do you know that we had a club racer protesting the Fan Walk by not participating and tried to have others join him?

The reason for the protest is that the drivers/teams felt they were being left with less track time. This isn’t IMSA, they aren’t there to shake hands with the public and make their sponsors happy. They are there to race. I get that but the Showcase is an opportunity for people to meet them and learn more about grassroots racing. Sure we read Grassroots magazine but how many readers have actual interaction with racers? So I was on the side of the Race Board Chair and as the Showcase chair, we did the Fan Walk.

I’m happy to say that the only drivers not part of the Fan Walk was the one protestor and those who couldn’t have their car ready in time. The latter is understandable. Point blank, not all that you do for the good of your club is going to be accepted with open arms.

My advice, keep going because when I walked pit road and saw people walking like they were looking at million dollar cars it gave me the biggest smile. Cameras out. Conversations happening. People looking at cars. Drivers there to meet and greet. JTR Motorsports, who runs a first gen CR-X, had their whole team greeting people and handing out team goodies. They told me, “Yes we are grassroots but that shouldn’t stop us from being like the big teams!” This was amazing! And I’m so glad I told everyone on the call that night to stop, we are doing this. End story. Move on.

It’s not easy to be the lead. It’s not easy to be the person with the idea. But if you believe in what you are doing then you have to at least try.

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Logistics

Have a plan and put it in place. Our event offered ride-a-longs. In order to determine a “guest” from an “event participant” we decided to use wristbands. Our club racers have their own wristband color and their guests receive a card. Our guests have a wristband that is a different color and our Solo and Rallycross event drivers have a shared wristband color. So due to the demands of our Club Racing staff we have multiple systems for those who signed the wavier.

The Track Event Ride-a-Long Scenario

It’s the Track Event portion of the day. I’m running up and down the pit road because this year unfortunately we didn’t stage guests and send them out to a car in an orderly fashion. Instead they were set free to go to whichever pit box of the car they wanted to ride in. Helmets being available for each rider – out the window. Whomever was closest to the helmets grabbed one and got out there. It was a hot mess.

So I’m running to get people helmets. Making every effort possible to keep our guests happy. And as I am doing so I am noticing that some riders standing in line do not have wristbands on. Red flag! I stop, ask them if they have a wristband and they promptly tell me they do not nor do they need one. Now I’m confused. That wasn’t how it was supposed to work. So I continue to ask as to why they do not need one and the spectators go immediately on the defensive. Why? Because now I may stop them from doing something they were told they could do.

This is where I have to stop and take a breath. Find diplomacy in order for them to hear me out. I explain that I need to know if they signed the waiver and weekend membership form because it extends our insurance to them. And I just want to ensure that they are covered. This explanation – and them listening to me - changed the tone of the conversation. They explained to me that as guests of the Club Racers they signed in that gate and by signing that waiver they are given a card which they presented to me. I thanked them for the information and told them to have a great time.

Be prepared for this. Work with the system that is in place and make sure everyone is covered.

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Track announcer

In our first year of the Showcase I had suggested using the PA system to do announcements for our guests to know what, when and where. However our Showcase staff that was part of the Club Racing event said that would be fine as long as they were short as they did not want to bother the Club Racing participants. They did not want someone calling the races. In 2018, our second year, that changed. Our Race Board Chair wanted a professional announcer and the price was right so we did it. It was fantastic.

Using the DIS media center and equipment for the announcements it sounded professional. Our guests were informed what club race was happening, were reminded what time our Track Event program was happening and to check out both the Solo and Rallycross areas. Our announcer was out walking around talking to the event staff, the racers and the guests. Again, we are looking and feeling more like a professional event. Remember, we want our guests to be part of our event, not be there to spectate.

Now let me tell you where the announcer really paid off for me.

Track announcer story

Back to the portion of my story where I was running up and down pit road tracking down helmets for our Track Event passengers. So I’m running asking people if they have a helmet and I come across this couple. I stop to ask them their situation and they are not happy. They are on the very start of aggravation. This is not good. It was him and his girlfriend and he *really* wanted her in Big Black Beauty, our 69 Camaro owned and driven by Ed Michalek. I mean, who could blame them his car is just insanely beautiful. I apologize and run off to find them a helmet.

Now during me doing all this, the Track Event lead is driving guests around the track. Look. Be honest with yourself, can you really participate when you are supposed to be running an event like this? I highly suggested all leads to not take part in the event. I didn’t drive in the Solo event that weekend because I knew while the show was on for our guests the circus was happening for our event staff. He did have a helper who wasn’t very familiar with what was going on but trying. He had a helmet, I grab it and go straight back for that couple. Give them the helmet, ensure it fits, apologize and tell them to have a great time.

They are now happier. Good. So I’m still going up and down pit road and see the announcer and take some time to talk to him. He lets me know he is there to talk with the passengers and put them on the announcement system. Just as he is telling me this who do I see come back over the wall but the man’s girlfriend and she is smiling. I immediately direct the announcer thier way and bam! Situation resolved. She was loving the ride and the attention after and so was her boyfriend.

Man I was tired after this portion of the event. Look, you have to be able to be able to think on your feet. See and read a situation for what it is and be able to resolve it. Put everyone and everything before yourself. A couple went from aggravated to elated. That is the one of many success stories you want from your event.

While in our first year it was thought that it would be a distraction as you can see it was a really big help and a fun addition to our event

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Flexibility

Last Minute Changes

Several changes made by DIS at the operations meeting the day before the event started were not communicated to me or the team causing several issues for the setup staff.

The Rallycross paddock was reduced for spectator parking. This was due to a change by DIS that the outer grass areas inside the track were not going to be allowed as a parking area. So the Paddock Marshall made the call to reduce the area but did not communicate that down the chain because it’s his paddock and his decision.

Okay. Understood but when the Showcase staff that was out there to ensure everything was setup asked why it had to be done he and her did not communicate. It was a standoff. He would not listen and she didn’t want anything more to do with it. Fortunately there was enough space for our rallycrossers.

Communication. Always will be the very first and last element of any breakdown in the system. Speaking of rallyrcross.

We had to move it. The area we used previously had been paved over. While the Jeep people were bringing in dirt to cover the area for their event the week before ours, they wanted $25,000 to leave it there for us. They apparently paid $75,000 to have it brought in and taken away afterwards. The reasoning was that the track had just paved the area to make the vendor row better for those larger races like the Rolex. So they had to lay down plywood over the asphalt then cover it with dirt. Remember, slashed budget. Not even in the first year could we have covered this.

Fortunately, the Speedway worked with us and allowed us to use the grass area next to the paved area. This was a much smaller area which could not accommodate a course that could be utilized for a points event by Rallycross. However, a good number of the Rallycrossers agreed to come out and do it just for fun and to give rides. Unfortunately due to rain, a large number of runs were made in the mud because that is a blast, the rallycross dug down in to the netting of the landscaping. In the end the Speedway charged us $12,500 to repair the area afterwards and for fencing off the area. The Speedway's charge was just a pass through of what they were charged.

Originally it was thought that the land would heal on its own as it does after an event. However the track was having an event at the end of the month and wanted it repaired quickly.

Track Event and the Rain

Also, the rain on Sunday required some flexibility on our part. We ended up cancelling the Track Event ride-a-longs due to track conditions. Some cars did not have the tires to take passengers along on wet pavement and safety was also an issue.

Changing the date

We were going to try for September 2018 so that we could catch the college kids who are our ideal volunteer pool. Plus we have Embry Riddle next to DIS who are aeronautical engineers and that build FSAE cars which you see at Solo Nationals. But due to hurricanes and the historical nature of them in Florida at that time of the year we moved the event back to May.

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Safety and other items

[What if scenarios. Going back and forth with the presentation audience to hear their thoughts on actual events that happened during our event.]

Starting an event earlier than planned: Track Event. Don’t rush to failure.

The Club Racers had finished their morning races without incident so there was an open window to start that portion of our event early. I received a call on the radio and was asked if they could. Now I’m going to stop and ask you, what would you do.

[Audience response]

My boss, Col. Dunaway (US Army, ret.) has a saying of don’t rush to failure. I live by this. As I am going thru the radio chat asking who is ready and who is not it is incurring to my auditor in the back of my mind that a lot of the moving pieces for a safe event may not be in place. So I declined and said we would start at the starting time.

Who do you think was not an appreciated person for making that decision? Yep. Me. The simple fact is there are a lot of pieces that have to be in place anytime anyone is out on track. And even though one piece is swearing up and down that it’s okay to go ahead and go there will be another piece screaming louder that they weren’t ready.

Each guest is my responsibility. Is your responsibility. Is each and every SCCA member’s responsibility. Always remember that and let it guide you to make the right choice. Year two and I am happy to say that we had no “Guest” safety incidents. Now our SCCA President, Mike Cobb, putting another bandage on Lee Hill’s club race car and then almost going thru the fence in the autocross course were incidents. But he’s a member, these things happen.

Speeding down pit lane.

Pit in/out speeds should be reduced during a non-race event. We asked for this and a driver did not oblige. What would you do?

[Audience response]

I found Scott, our Pit Marshall, pointed out the car and had him handle it. That is their lane of traffic, let them handle it.

Unwanted guest per DIS.

Believe it or not the track you or I go to may not love each and every one of us. Instead they may have a list of people are banned from the track. DIS had that person and asked our volunteers at the guest booth to let them know if a certain person showed up. Our volunteers asked what should they do?

[Audience response]

I told them to let the person sign in, let them walk back to their car and then safely alert security personnel that the person was onsite.

Minors.

Minors who are at least 12 years of age, and are at least 57 inches tall and have an official SCCA Minor Release FL 1895 witnessed by an SCCA Official Member completed by both parents are then eligible to fill out a Weekend Membership form to participate in the ride-a-longs being offered by Autocross and Rallycross.

Track Events ride-a-long passengers must be 16 years of age or older and have an official SCCA Minor Release FL 1895 witnessed by an SCCA Official Member completed by both parents.

Minors will “only” be able to sign up for ride-a-longs in the Fan Zone registration booth. A parent will need to accompany them during the registration process and be present in the ride-a-long area.

Minors under 12 years old (except Junior drivers) are not permitted in “hot” areas (staging, grid, start, finish, course).

With all that being said, would you allow minors at your event?

[Audience response]

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Results

How many attended.

How many signed up for volunteer marshals.

Who filled the volunteer positions?

What was the feedback from the Spectators? Event participants?

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The aftermath. Social Media melt down.

We had an incident on an unofficial CFR SCCA Facebook page. So all this promotion to come find us turned in to, come find out what a mess we are. So not good. All these new members and bam, we just destroyed what they thought we were.

Remember. We, you, have done all this work to have a successful event, gain membership and volunteers then have them find us on Social Media and they will. This Smartphone in my hand guarantees that they will. Everything we represented ourselves to be at the Showcase has to be how we represent ourselves on Social Media. Period. There is no question. Don’t let them see the circus that goes on behind the show until they are so in that they understand the circus is how it works and it is kind of enjoyable at times.

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The Future: How to make the Showcase a smaller package.

This big show once a year is great. But it is a lot of work and a lot of expense. To say that Club Racing has the volunteer staff to handle spectators at their events is just not true in most cases. So the question becomes how to do this in an economical fashion. The first two years we expended funds we had but cannot continue to do that. We cut the radio budget, the pamphlets went to eDocuments and due to the cost of the rallycross lawn replacement that needs to be looked in to. Unexpected expenses will come but the mission remains.

 One idea is to make a Volunteer Weekend package. Where we advertise a weekend volunteer program to the general public. This is a smaller package of the Showcase that can be handled on a regular basis and is more cost effective. Again looking for free or low cost advertising. The goal being to attract those who want to become involved but don’t know where to start.

So we advertise to join us at the next race, we will introduce them to our volunteer chief who will show them around and let them volunteer in different positons over the weekend. We can even direct them to our Learning Management System to go thru all the positions before they arrive. From tech to corner marshal to beverage provider – let them test it all. Then see what their favorite is so that they will come back. A way to have them come out is to work with local businesses to incentivize their first trip.

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Daytona Cone Video

We promised it last year and have it for your this year.

Our Membership Chair, Darren Gunn, took groups of spectators around to the different venues in a minivan. He arranged to be allowed to take them up to the tower where race control is housed. Unexpected things occurred on these tours. Darren was challenged to take the van out on the RallyCross course and did so with the spectators on board. He was also was challenged to drive the Autocross course with the van. While Darren didn’t feel up to doing that, he let our AutoCross Chief drive the van on the course. The spectators that had the opportunity to go with Darren had a terrific time, couldn’t stop talking about it, and several ended up volunteering to be marshals.

Enjoy the video and thank you for coming out today to listen to us!