Tall Ships Festival Analysis

**Marketing 344**

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This year, the Tall Ship Festival returns to Erie for another exciting weekend. This festival draws people from all over the area to Erie for a chance to visit unique ships from all over the world. This festival is not as unique as the ships that will be there, but how does Erie’s Tall Ship festival stack up against the other ones that are happening this summer along the Great Lakes?

First off, you need to look at what ticket prices are of these festivals. In Erie’s case, tickets range in duration, from Friday’s only, to single and full weekend tickets and including a VIP pass that allows access to the festival all weekend, a fast pass to skip lines for tours of the ships, and access to the Dobbins Landing dining tent. The prices of these tickets range from $8 to $22 for the normal tickets, with the VIP passes costing $100. Erie’s prices seem to be a little higher than other festivals, which makes it harder to sell tickets.

The Erie festival struggles to offer opportunities that many of the other tall ship festivals offer. One of the biggest things that Erie should look to incorporate is the Parade of Sail tickets to ride on the boats. People are willing to pay a decent price to be more than just spectators from the shore. Tall Ships Duluth charges $150 for the ability to be on the boat during the parade and Tall Ships Green Bay charges $285 per ticket to be on the boat during the Parade of Sail. If Tall Ships Erie incorporates this, they will be bringing in a huge amount of money. If they do offer this as an opportunity, then they need to promote it much more to get the knowledge out.

Every festival has food and beverages available, but there should be more than simple vendors that sell the same thing as every other festival. The problem is that the information for other Tall Ships Festivals did not show what vendors were going to be there for food, but Erie needs to go above and beyond. People are going to go to see the ships, but people love delicious food that you cannot find every day. Tall Ships Erie should invite places like Sara’s, that are exclusive to Erie and that people love around Erie to come and set up stands to get people to know what is in the area.

One of the biggest problems for Tall Ships Erie is the sponsorships. For Cape Charles, Virginia and the Tall Ships Festival there, the sponsorships they sell are listed below:

**Sponsorships**

**ADMIRAL**

**$10,000**

* Your own vessel including cocktail party for up to 10 guests.
* Your company or personal name represented in front of the vessel on the dock.
* Invitation to a very special Captains' Dinner
* Four tickets for Day Sail aboard sponsored vessel.
* Helicopter ride for four.
* Lead promotional spot on Tall Ships marketing including, web, radio, print\*.
* Inclusion on event t-shirts

**CAPTAIN**

**$5,000**

* Inclusion on all promo materials including web, radio, print\*.
* Inclusion on event t-shirts.
* Four tickets for Day Sails.
* Helicopter ride for two.
* Invitation to Captains' Dinner

**FIRST MATE**

**$2,5000**

* Inclusion on all promo materials including web, radio, print.\*
* Inclusion on event t-shirts.
* Two tickets for Day Sails.

**BOATSWAIN**

**$1,000**

* Inclusion on all promo materials including web, radio, print.\*
* Inclusion on event t-shirts.

**LOCAL SKIPPER**

**$500**

* Special Discounted Pricing for Local Business to be included in promotional materials for the web

These are the levels of sponsorship that other tall ship festivals have created. Obviously, the more you spend, the more you get out of the event as far as being the headliner. People see your name everywhere and more importantly it is tax deductible. If Flagship Niagara is going to go after high profile sponsors at the Admiral and Captain level, they need to include information of their donation being tax deductible. Companies are going to give money to charities and other community based funds, so why not the Flagship Niagara? It comes every three years and this is where the majority of their money is made. We need to deploy an aggressive sales force on the city and sweep all the major companies in town. We should at least aim for First Mate and settle on Boatswain in worst case scenarios. The companies have the money to donate; it's in their corporate philanthropy. The question remains, how can we make them want to allocate their funds to us instead other local charities?

Tall Ships Erie needs to be able to draw a crowd with more than just the ships. Tall Ships Duluth draws a crowd by having the World’s Largest Rubber Duck. This is not suggesting to build something that is record breaking, but have activities or concerts that people would be willing to come see that add people to the Tall Ships Festival. If more people come to the festival, Tall Ships Erie will make more money that helps to promote the Flagship Niagara League and Museum.

For promoting, Tall Ships Erie does not do much in the community. Promoting does cost money, but they need to do some to help sell tickets. The last Tall Ships Festival drew 83,000 people, but that number is going to rise. To make it a big jump, they need to promote about the reconstructed Spanish Galleon that is coming to the festival, as well as saying how the Flagship Niagara was recognized as the top sail training program in 2015 out of 150 total programs. Presenting information that is showing how top of the line the U.S. Brig Niagara and that a newly reconstructed ship is coming to the festival will separate Erie’s festival from others.

Promoting is a struggle for Tall Ships Erie due to their website as well. The site is very basic. It is not very interactive, unlike other sites like Tall Ships Green Bay, Duluth, and Bay City. As long as the information gets updated, those sites have the potential to be great to inform people. Tall Ships Erie needs to take advantage of the free promoting they can do on social media. Tall Ships Duluth is very active on Twitter, which can allow them to post and be seen by thousands of people. Erie does have one, but it has not been posted on in the past five years. There was a tall ship festival in the past five years, why not use this is an easy, and not to mention free, way to get information out and promote the event.

Erie needs to step up on a lot of levels to make it a top tall ships festival. Prices are slightly higher than other festivals, as well as not offering Parade of Sail rides on the boats, or just not advertising it. The ability of drawing in sponsors is not as set in stone as others either. Promoting costs money and the Flagship Niagara League may be struggling with funds, but stepping up its promoting on social media, which is free, will draw more people and more sponsors to the festival which will bring more money in to help keep the U.S. Brig Niagara in the best shape it can be.

**Sources**

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