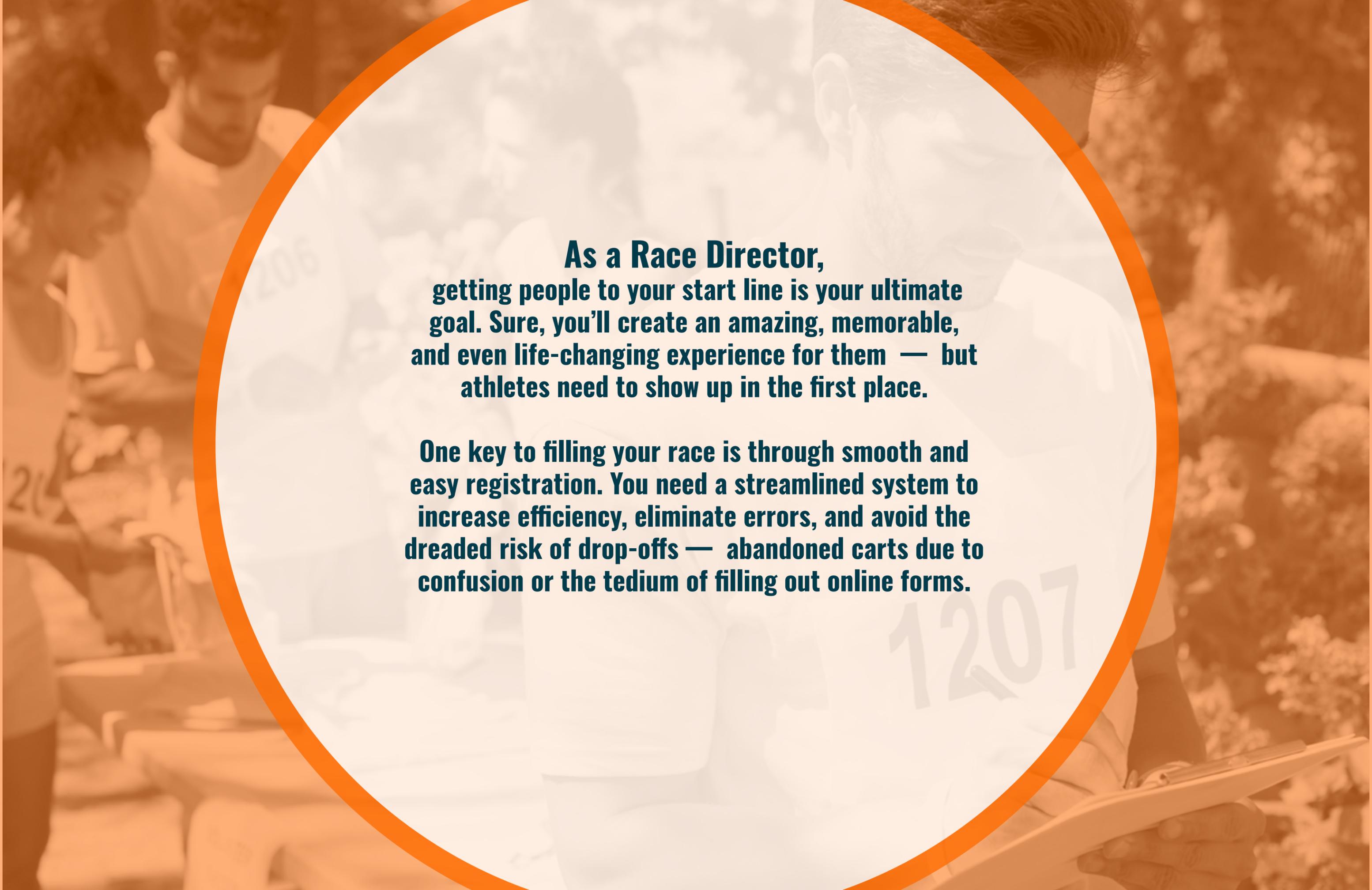




HOW TO OPTIMIZE THE REGISTRATION PATH

EVENT DIRECTOR'S GUIDE



**As a Race Director,
getting people to your start line is your ultimate
goal. Sure, you'll create an amazing, memorable,
and even life-changing experience for them — but
athletes need to show up in the first place.**

**One key to filling your race is through smooth and
easy registration. You need a streamlined system to
increase efficiency, eliminate errors, and avoid the
dreaded risk of drop-offs — abandoned carts due to
confusion or the tedium of filling out online forms.**



Athlinks Services offers simple, streamlined tools and sound advice to help optimize your event registration and drive ever-greater numbers of participants to your event. That's why we created this guide: to help you drive registration and to highlight the ways in which we can help. Included, you'll find:

- **FEATURES: WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A REGISTRATION PLATFORM**
- **QUESTIONS: WHAT TO ASK, WHEN TO ASK IT, & HOW QUESTIONS CAN IMPACT DROP-OFF RATES**
- **ADD-ONS: SHOULD YOU INCLUDE MERCHANDISE & DONATIONS IN THE REG PATH?**
- **SPECIAL CATEGORIES: MANAGING TEAM ENTRIES, FUNDRAISING, & EVENT SERIES**
- **PRICING: CREATING AN EFFECTIVE PRICING STRATEGY & THE VALUE OF REFERRALS**
- **SPONSORS: INTEGRATING YOUR PARTNERS FROM THE GET-GO**
- **HUMAN BEHAVIOR: WHAT THE DATA TELLS US**



FEATURES: WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A REGISTRATION PLATFORM

First things first.

Let's consider the features you should look for when choosing a registration platform, and the reasons they're important.

1. Easy to Find, Easy to Understand

Be sure you can provide potential participants with all the information they need in one place. You'll want a direct registration link on your website and social media platforms, plus an intriguing event description to draw people in. FAQs on registration, refund/transfer policies, event information, and more should be included on the registration site and confirmation email.

2. Streamlined Externally

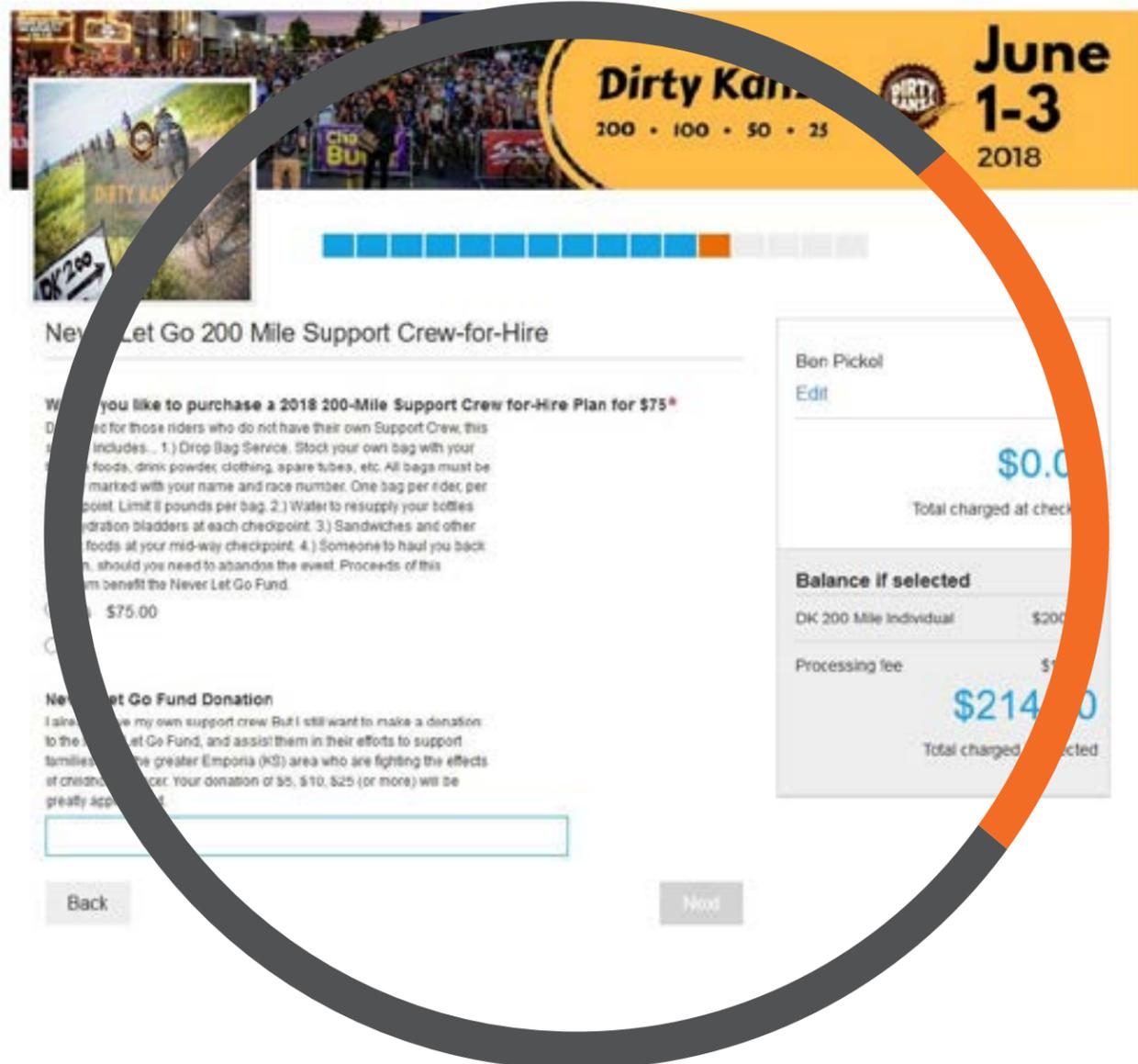
One too many clicks can cause an interested athlete to delay — or even avoid — registration. Look for a reg platform that offers online, mobile, paperless on-site registration and race check-in and makes the sign up experience as brief and easy as possible.

3. Streamlined Internally

Choose a platform that simplifies data management across your team, so that everyone works on the same data in one system — from registration, on-site registration, and race check-in through to scoring and live results.

4. Electronic & Offline Capabilities

Be sure your reg platform includes offline packet pickup, athlete lookup, and bib/tag assignment — so that the reg process is seamless, regardless of reliable Internet connectivity.



FEATURES: Continued

5. Capture Every Entry

A reg platform that integrates with your timing system allows for “always-open” registration, meaning there’s no need to close online registration before the start in order to assign bibs and prepare packets.

6. Flexibility

Flexibility is also nice, so look for a platform that offers both a seamless interface with timing/results, plus the ability to use reg services independently.

7. Comprehensive Features

Yes, you can (and should) expect a reg platform to handle even the trickiest situations — including price changes, coupons, teams, email communications, corporate payments, lotteries, and more.

8. Custom Questions

Every event is unique, and while some reg questions apply in every situation, others may be specific to your race. Be sure you have the option to customize your reg questions and choices (as well as to hide reg choices, if desired).

9. Sponsor Integration

You’ll want the option to add custom sponsor content and offers to maximize the value to your event partners. Plus, brand recognition on your reg site will bring participants back, year after year.

10. Marketing Support

A robust reg platform includes integrated marketing support, including automated emails, referral URLs, and tools to manage referral programs and drive registrations from social media.

11. Tracking and Reporting

You — and your sponsors — will be hungry for hard numbers to gauge your return on investment, plus learn what does and does not work in order to improve your event the following year.

12. Ongoing Innovation

Your reg platform’s behind-the-scenes product and support teams should stay on top of industry trends, strive to always innovate, welcome your feedback, be receptive to your needs, and develop new products and enhance existing products accordingly.

That’s quite a laundry list of things to look for in a reg platform — but by no means is it too much to ask. In fact — in case you’re wondering — **Athlinks Services offers all of the above!** You can learn more about our registration software and other services at: Services.Athlinks.com.



QUESTIONS: WHAT TO ASK, WHEN TO ASK IT, & HOW QUESTIONS CAN IMPACT DROP-OFF RATES

With the opportunity to customize the questions you ask at registration comes the responsibility to include the right ones — a lofty task, but one you can surely master. The key here is to gather all the critical info you need, without overdoing it. Remember, you want registration to be fast and easy — no one likes to waste time online (or in line, for that matter).

There are several key questions — what we refer to as the **CORE 10** — which every event entry should include:

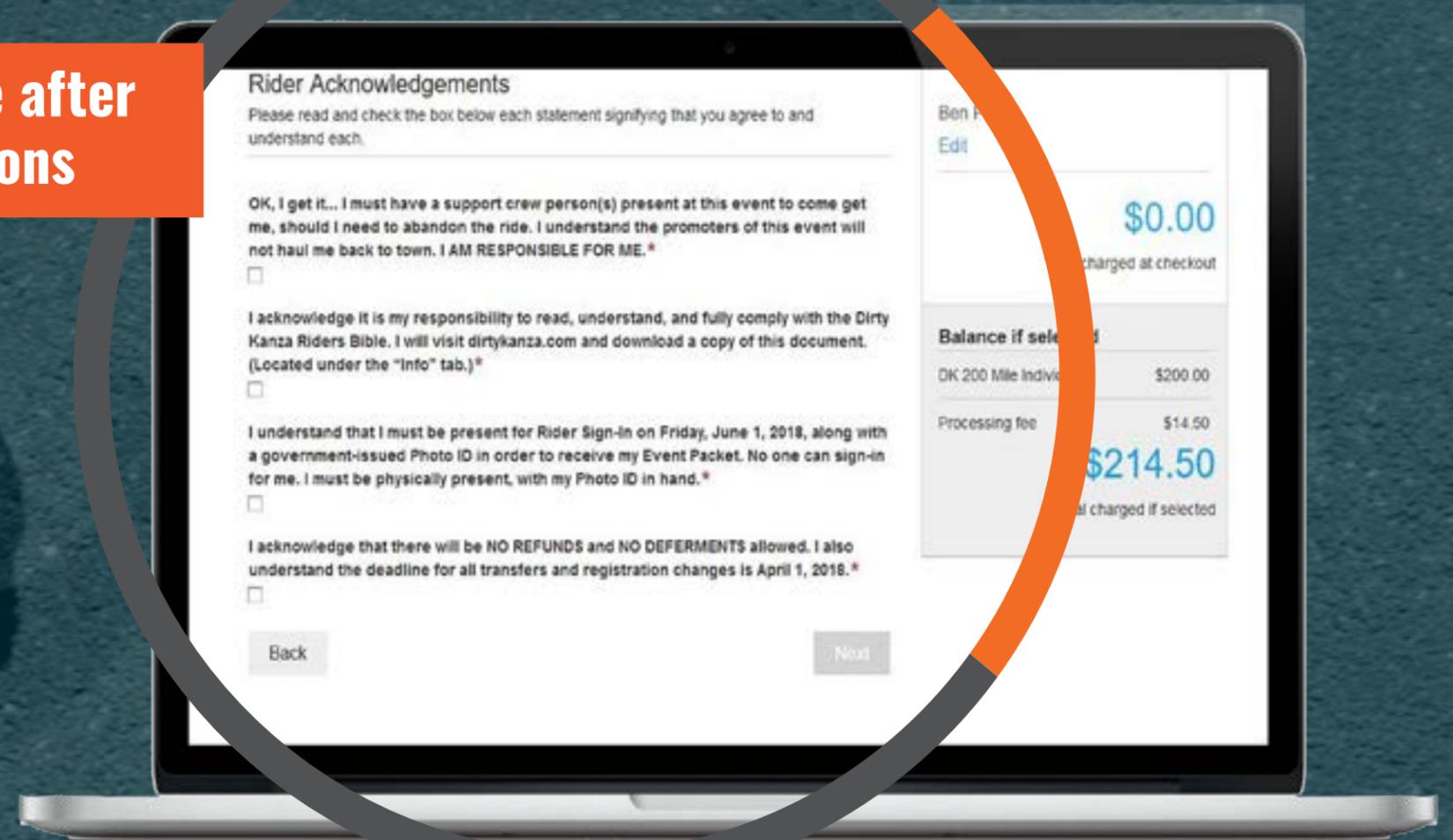
1. **First Name**
2. **Last Name**
3. **Age/DOB**
4. **Gender**
5. **Address**
6. **Zip Code**
7. **Phone**
8. **Email**
9. **Emergency Contact**
10. **Shirt Size**

A look at events using Athlinks Services shows us that 96% include 20-35 reg questions in the reg path. Assuming your must-ask questions include the Core 10, plus 5 more (therefore, roughly a Core 15), that means that most events are adding another 5-20 questions. Within that 96% of events, the reg abandonment data looks like this:

Reg Questions	Abandonment
20	10%
21	14%
22	13%
23	14%
24	22%
25	23%
26	21%
27	32%
28	41%
29	37%
30	40%
31	60%
32	62%
33	66%
34	66%
35	66%

8% spike after 23 questions

There are also a handful of other “mandatory” questions — such as a waiver, race division, and pace (if you use a corral system — although our SmartCorral system offers automated, customizable corral assignment) — but these will vary based on the event. And you can certainly add more — like merchandise sales, donation options, athletic background, how an athlete heard about the race, etc. But before you create a reg form that rivals the Inquisition, take a look at the data we’ve compiled from a study on cart abandonment:



Now this is logical.

The more questions you ask, the more weary the registrant becomes and therefore the more likely they are to abandon. But pay special attention to the steep increase between asking 23 and 24 questions. The data shows that 23 can be considered somewhat of a magic number of questions that athletes will bear before abandonment escalates. In other words, aside from the 15 necessary questions, reg forms with an additional 8 questions or less will see significantly lower average abandonment.

23

The takeaway?

Get the info you need, but don't go crazy asking too many questions! Consider Athlinks Services' SmartCorral system to eliminate the need to ask an athlete's estimated finish time — our unique data access allows you to extract this info automatically. Similarly, household income can be deduced through the city/state demographics. Referral information can be gleaned through free Google tracking and Google Tag Manager. Therefore, you really can reduce the questions you require at registration, making the process significantly faster (and no longer frustrating) for your participants.

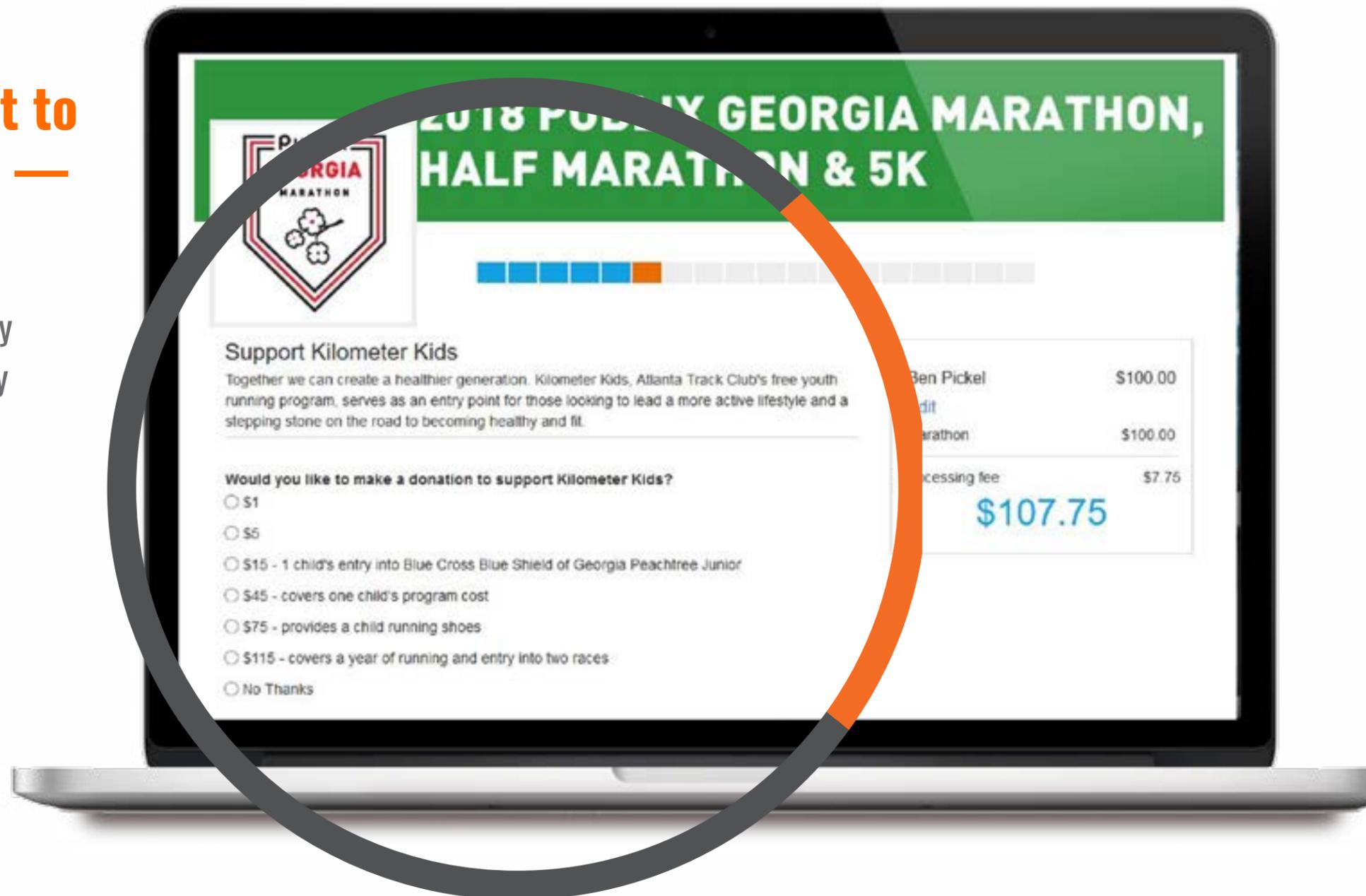




ADD-ONS: SHOULD YOU INCLUDE MERCHANDISE & DONATIONS IN THE REG PATH?

You may decide that you want to offer add-ons in the reg path —

things like event merchandise, extra tickets to a welcome dinner, or a donation option for a charity partner. After all, it makes sense that people may enjoy the ease of one-stop shopping. Ultimately, the decision is up to you, and will certainly vary depending on the particulars of your race. Here's some interesting data we've found that may help guide your decision.



Regarding Products

- 54% of Athlinks events opt to sell product(s) in the reg path.
- Of these, 31% of athletes registering for the event purchase a product, spending an average of \$20 in addition to reg fees. *That translates to \$6,200 additional per 1,000 athletes (that's without deducting your cost for the products first, which you'll need to do to determine your true potential profit).*
- Among Athlinks athletes, men are 51% more likely to buy a product in the reg path than women.

Regarding Donations

- 20% of Athlinks events include donation opportunities in the reg path.
- Of these, only 4.3% of registrants make a donation, averaging \$15 each. *Per 1,000 athletes, that's \$645 in donations.*
- Among Athlinks athletes, men and women donate the same amount on average, while women are almost twice as likely to donate.



You'll want to assess the number of questions already in your event's reg path, and whether it's worth adding another for merch sales or donations to the total. You'll also want to take into account the cost to you of any products offered for sale. Additionally, consider other venues for sales and donations, such as a pre or post-race expo. Are people more likely to purchase apparel that they can touch and try on? Should you offer sales online and onsite? Might a charity partner be better served with a dedicated pre-race email? These scenarios may require trial and error on your part to see how the stats stack up, as compared against the reg path data from our study.



SPECIAL CATEGORIES: MANAGING TEAM ENTRIES, FUNDRAISING, & EVENT SERIES



Group or team registration incentives, fundraising initiatives, and series registrations are all methods that may well inspire more athletes to enter your events. The registration aspect of these special categories can get a bit confusing, so be sure your reg platform offers clear and intuitive instructions, plus any extra tools to help these groups flourish and fully enjoy their experience.

For example, when registering a team, it's extremely helpful for an athlete to be able to view the team captain's information, the number of spots remaining, and any parameters or restrictions to joining. Another beneficial feature is flexible payment options, so that either the team captain can pay for the entire team at once, or the individual team members can each pay their share at the time of registration.

HOLUALOA
Tucson Marathon
tucsonmarathon.com
HALF MARATHON • HALF MARATHON • MARATHON RELAY • FAMILY FITNESS FEST

Team Selection

Join existing team
 Create new team

Ben's Team
Current team: Ben's Team
Your team name is available!

Ben Pickel \$230.00
Edit
Marathon Relay - Up to 4 People \$230.00
Processing fee \$16.53
\$246.53

Back Next

Fundraising pages

Allow athletes to create individual or team fundraising pages (our platform works with Crowdrise for this), and offer incentives for different fundraising levels: raising \$50 gets you a water bottle, \$100 gets you free entry into next year's race, and so on. You can also send an email dedicated to charity racing tools and tips, including a cheat sheet of fundraising ideas, sample emails or social media posts, 'Donate Now' buttons, and more.



Event series

Event series are another excellent way to drive registrations by offering discounts for multi-event registration. Your reg platform should allow you to create event series from any combination of events in your organization, and create discount incentives accordingly.

You guessed it — Athlinks Services offers all these features and more, enabling you to process special registration categories with ease and feel confident in marketing these opportunities to potential participants.



PRICING: CREATING AN EFFECTIVE PRICING STRATEGY & THE VALUE OF REFERRALS

Pricing a race is easy.

First, set a budget. Then, figure out how to pay for everything. Just divide the dollars you need by the number of athletes you expect, and voila — that's your reg fee. Right? Not exactly. In fact, not even close. But don't worry — follow along and we'll help you get a handle on effective event pricing.

You will need to determine your budget first. When building your budget, be sure to factor in things like price breaks, discounted pricing, comped ambassador or VIP entries, and registration transaction fees (unless you plan to pass these fees along to your participants). Funding-wise, reg fees probably won't be the sole source of income for your event (consider sponsors, merchandise sales, etc.). Also understand your audience. Is your event in a blue-collar neighborhood, or somewhere with more disposable income to spare? And most importantly, research your competition. See what others are charging in your area for a similar event. If you're adding significant value that goes above and beyond what others are offering — such as an amazing course, epic views, sweet swag, VIP treatment, or celebrity interaction — you may be able to justify premium pricing; otherwise, stick within the range that your research confirms.



A Balanced Strategy

Developing a race pricing strategy that strikes the perfect balance between profitability and affordability is a mad science. Not many event directors do it well — in fact, most undercharge for their events and end up stretching pennies to plan a successful race. And while you're probably not in this business to become a millionaire, it is possible to find the sweet spot that allows you to keep your event in the black. The key is to follow these five rules of event pricing:

Set Price Breaks

Unless you have a very small, local event, you absolutely cannot stick to a single entry fee for the entirety of the online registration period. It is essential to encourage early registration by creating multiple price breaks. This will incentivize early registration, ensure that you receive revenue throughout the reg cycle, assist you in planning for an estimated volume of athletes, and provide a great opportunity to email your past participant database with valuable information (i.e. the price is going up) and keep your event fresh in their minds.





Pricing Strategy 1

One price break strategy is to set prices by date. Four price breaks — early bird registration, regular registration, late registration, and race day registration — are the most common pricing structure, with early bird registration as the least expensive and race day registration the most expensive.

Benefits of this type of pricing structure include:

- Motivates people to register early
- Allows people to plan in conjunction with their budget
- Provides clear deadlines for price increases
- Provides you the opportunity to “roll back” prices for an extra week or two, if desired reg numbers are not achieved within each price break, in an attempt to motivate more registrants

Pricing Strategy 2

Another method is to set prices by number of participants. For example, you can charge \$25 for the first 25 registrants; after that, the price jumps to \$30, and so on. Your online race registration software should offer this feature, making it easy to set up and customize to your event.

Pros of this pricing strategy include:

- Creates scarcity and a sense of exclusivity (people love to be among the first for anything)
- Motivates people to register early
- The words “SOLD OUT,” when each level of registrants is achieved, adds extra motivation

One potential drawback to this strategy is that your competitors are able to view the rate at which your event fills — although, depending on your level of speed and success, this could also be viewed as beneficial!

REFERRALS

Incentivize Referrals

“Refer a Friend” is one of the oldest tricks in the book — because it works.

Offer your registrants a discount or special swag if they refer a certain number of friends. While you may lose a few bucks on one registrant, you’ll more than make up for it with the friends they refer at full price. You can track referrals using automatically generated individual coupon codes or URLs (delivered in the reg confirmation email) that registrants can share via email and their social media channels.

You may also want to proactively recruit ambassadors for your event. These can be influential professional athletes, beloved fitness figureheads within your community, or even running/fitness bloggers. You can easily view their social media platforms to determine who has the most reach online, and therefore who stands to generate the most registrations with a unique promo code. You can also arrange ambassador-led training runs or a race tips and strategy symposium. You will probably invest a bit more in your ambassadors than in the automated refer-a-friend feature — such as a free entry, as well as potentially a percentage of each entry fee — but your investment will certainly prove worthwhile.



If you’re not convinced as to the effectiveness of referral programs, consider this: **Athlinks Services offers a Referral Feature**, which automatically generates a unique referral URL per athlete registration, presented to them in the confirmation page, and which they are encouraged to share via social media and email. On average, every single referrer using their code drives 1.65 additional registrations. That means that every one referrer actually equals 2.65 registrations, or every referrer dollar actually equals \$2.65! So whatever your method — through an automated referral program or active recruitment or both — getting referrers and ambassadors on board is a nearly guaranteed way to grow your race.

PROMOTIONS

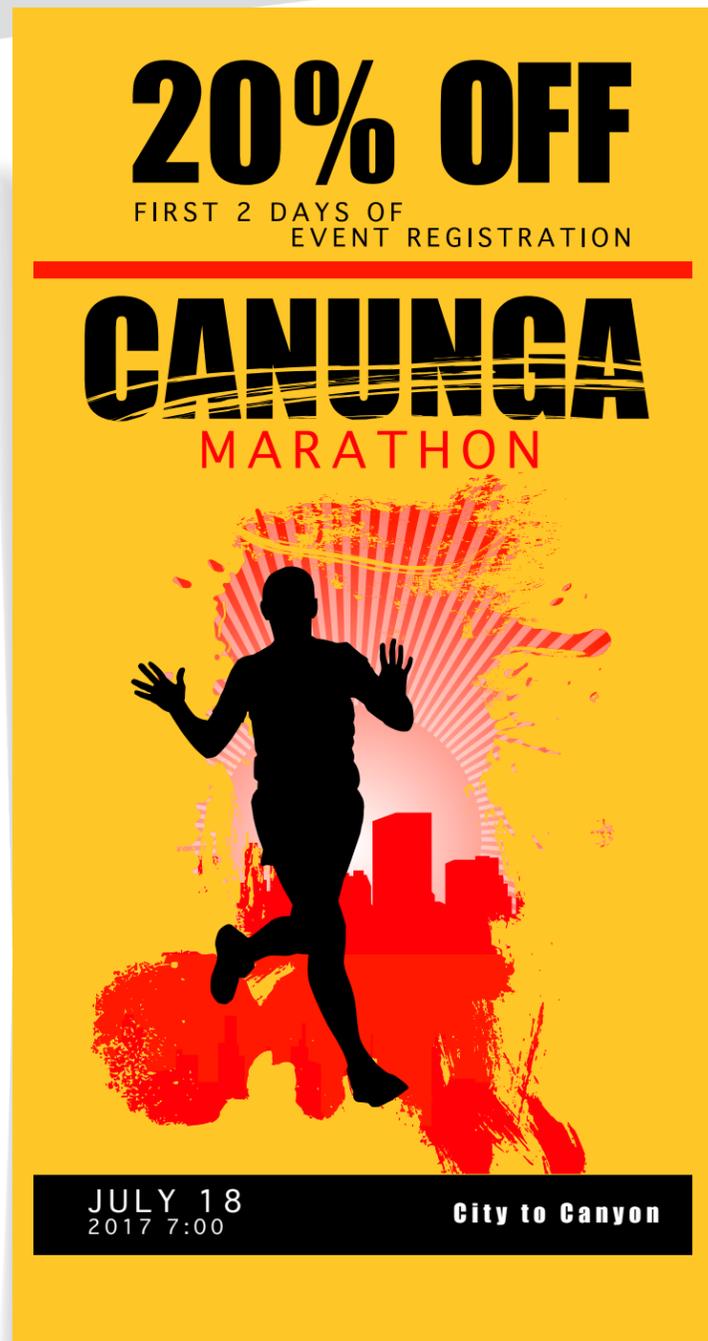
Push Promotions

From the moment registration opens until race day, run a few promotions to stir up interest in your event, and be sure to push them on your social media channels as well as via emails to past participants. These one-off pricing strategies can be a great way to grab attention — and extra entries. :

Promotion examples include:

- 20% off registration on Throwback Thursday with submission of a childhood running picture
- Ultra-low price for first 24 hours of registration
- Holiday-themed discounts
- Unique giveaway (i.e. a cycling jersey) when registered by a certain date
- Featured sponsor discount (think: Joe's Running Store Discount Day — \$10 off all new registrations!)

Also, consider creating a promo code to target registrations from specific groups. For example, give your local running store (or heck, your local microbrewery) a coupon code for \$5 off race registration. You can create postcards to leave at the register (or on the bar), or they can email the code to their mailing list. Health clubs, yoga studios, physical therapy clinics, corporate wellness programs, and even hospitals are also great venues for spreading the word — and a special discount incentive — for your race.



Enter a Promo Code

*Please type your promo code. Do not copy and paste.





Run A Registration Blitz

Want a great way to kick-start registration? The day after your event, open registration for the next year's race at a deep discount. Offer this price for a limited time (24 hours, one week, etc.) or for the first 100 registrations, for example. Then turn off registration until you would normally open. It's quite likely that athletes will be fired up for next year — and ready to recommit — immediately after crossing this year's finish line.

Offer VIP Pricing

VIP pricing works well as a driver for early registration as well as for fundraising. In this scenario, a certain number of dedicated VIP slots opens up a week prior to standard registration and costs twice as much, with the additional expense donated to your partner charity. Be sure to provide your VIPs a little something extra — like a private port-a-potty or portable heaters at the start of a cold race — to make them feel special.



SPONSORS: INTEGRATING YOUR PARTNERS FROM THE GET-GO

Sponsorship isn't simply about collecting a check and hanging a banner in your finish chute.

An effective sponsor relationship is a true partnership — one where you and your partner work to create multiple, unique, mutually-beneficial opportunities. The ability to integrate your event sponsors into the registration platform broadens the branding and messaging opportunities for your partners, and can provide measurable results to help justify — and potentially grow — their investment in your race.

Using Athlinks Services Custom Registration Forms as an example, here are some of the ways incorporating sponsors into registration can prove beneficial.

Custom reg forms allow you to include:

- Expand the value that you offer to multiple sponsors, corporate partners, or charities for a single event
- Share personalized information, messaging, pricing, or promos with specific participant groups
- Add unique sponsor branding to each form
- Add custom questions to each registration path
- Separate tracking to view which registrations come from each form
- Gain additional information about your athletes





HUMAN BEHAVIOR: WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

When do people register for events?

A fundamental question that drives event marketing is: When do people register for events? Most often, the assumed answer is incorrect.

Generally, event directors and industry insiders presume one of two scenarios:

- People register on Fridays and Saturdays, when they're thinking about training
- There's no pattern — it's all over the place

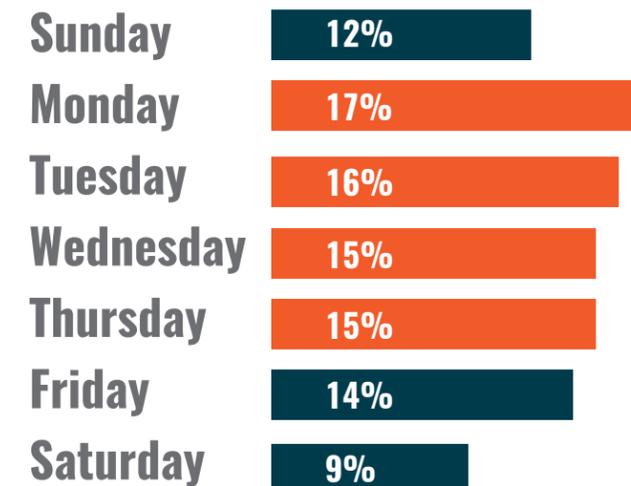
Here's what we found

Well, think again. We studied one million registrations to determine whether any patterns exist.

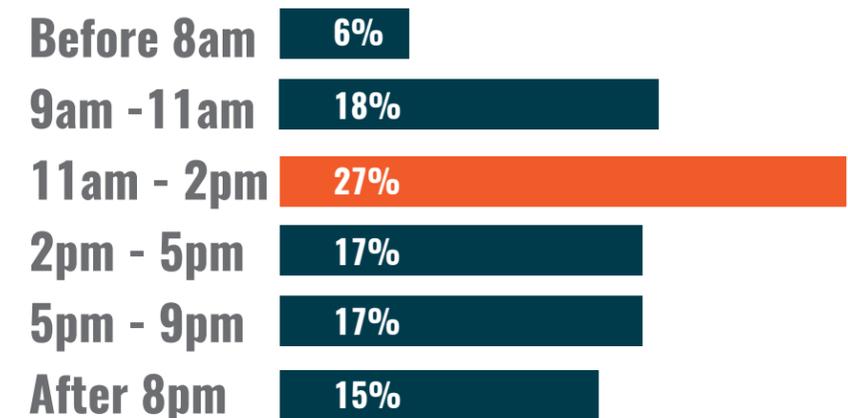
Here's what we found, across the board:

- People register Monday–Wednesday more than any other timeframe
- Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays actually see the lowest volume of registrations on average, by far
- People are most likely to register mid-day, just before or just after lunch

Best Day = Monday
Best Block = Monday - Wednesday
Worst Day = Saturday
Worst Block = Friday - Sunday



Peak Hours = Mid-Day (11am - 2pm)
Second Best = Morning (9am - 11am)
Worst = Early Morning (before 8am)





This data should help direct your marketing efforts (consider sending emails just before the weekday lunch break) and pricing strategy (schedule a price increase for Wednesday night and announce it on Monday morning, perhaps) and make the most of participant behaviors.

Another notable pattern — which is not at all surprising — is that race registrations surge during the last week of each month. This is easily explained by the traditional practice of making price changes on the first of a given month. This also presents a potential opportunity: rather than get lost in the noise of numerous event price changes, and fight for footing among all your competitors, why not make your event stand out with a unique price change timing strategy, such as on the 10th, 15th, or third Thursday of each month? Additionally, data on cart abandonment during online registration can prove informative and helpful.

Check out these stats:

- 15-20% is the industry norm for abandonment
- Abandonment dramatically increases in events where the entry fee isn't shown until the cart on the final page
- 50-75% of abandoned registrations will come back and complete registration if contacted within 7 days of abandonment, regardless of whether or not a discount code is offered



NOW WHAT: HOW ATHLINKS SERVICES CAN HELP

Assuming you've read this entire guide, you're well informed as to a number of ways to optimize the reg path for your event.

customer service solves problems and inspires customer loyalty. Our platform is industry tested and trusted to deliver ultra-efficient and easy-to-use race management solutions — all the features outlined in the “What to Look For in a Reg Platform” checklist above. We provide a robust toolkit designed to manage registration, drive athletes to your event, capture every possible registration, streamline data management, and track your success.

If you're already part of the Athlinks Services event family, we hope we've provided some new tips, data, and information on features that you may not currently put to full use. Either way — existing customer or new to Athlinks Services — we're always on hand and eager to help guide you through our products and the various aspects of event registration, with the goal of getting more and more athletes to your Thank You' page.

Ready. Set.
Let's grow those reg numbers!