



Improve the Live Event Experience for Attendees

For Event Management and Event Producers Who Want to Grow Attendance

Increase repeat attendees and maximize word of mouth promotion by providing an engaging, valuable experience event-goers will not forget.

Check out the following tips and tools that will assist in creating an event that meets your attendees' needs and exceeds their expectations. This document is intended to promote thoughtful analysis of the fundamental parameters that should be considered when planning or reinventing a convention.

Section 1: Create an Event that Strengthens Your Brand

Events have the ability to quickly strengthen (or weaken) a company's brand. Asking some key questions like those below can help to ensure you are aligning your event offerings with your brand identity.

- *Why do we have this event?*
- *What are our three main goals for this event?*
- *In what ways do the goals connect to our company identity/reputation?*
- *How will we know we met the goals?*

Every decision you make as you build the event should support one of your three goals as well as your company identity.

Every feature of your event is an opportunity to strengthen your brand identity and connect with your attendees, from the overall look and feel to the speakers, the content, and how you interact with customers at registration.

Visit the [Branding Worksheet](#) if you are interested in more assistance with developing and implementing your brand identity to create an impactful experience for your group.

Section 2: Content Alignment with Target Audience

Who is your audience and what will they gain by coming to your event? A few simple questions can assist with building or enhancing engaging content that matches your audiences' needs.

- *Who are the people that will benefit the most from my event?*
- *What will my event enable attendees to do better as a result of attending?*
- *What do I want my audience to feel energized and motivated to do as a result of attending my event?*

If you are trying to expand into new audiences without alienating your core group, a simple exercise can help you focus your content to match the needs of all groups. [Click here for a sample "Audience Content Matrix"](#).

Section 3: Select the Right Speakers and Entertainers

(and train them to connect with your audience)

Anyone who takes the stage at an event has a critical role in creating a valuable and memorable experience for the attendee. It is important to ensure there is an audience connection which will assist with securing repeat attendees. It is the responsibility of the event organizer to ensure everyone who takes the stage provides relevant information and enlists proper delivery methods for that information. What happens on stage has to benefit the attendee/exhibitor first. If the focus is not on the attendee experience first, they may choose to skip your event in future years.

Every event should have an audience connection during General Sessions, seminars, roundtable discussions, evening events and even during registration. Event organizers must choose the right people to speak, moderate, and otherwise engage the audience and work with those people to set expectations and ensure the presentations will align with the groups' goals. A set of Speaker Guidelines is very helpful in communicating expectations to the speakers. It is critical to help your speakers understand the responsibility they have in creating a "can't miss" show. (And speakers will also benefit from their participation in the successful event.) You can achieve this through a customized communications approach with your speakers and a strong communications campaign to your potential speaker pool. [Click here for "Working With Presenters"](#) information.

Section 4: Considering the Overall Experience

In reviewing event surveys or general feedback, are there areas to grow, improve, expand? Does registration run smoothly? Do you create the proper environment for people to connect and meet each other? Do you have opportunities to put people with like interests together? Is the food up to the standards of the event? Are there areas to sit down? Are there ways for participants to meet you/your staff and/or provide feedback?

All of these components influence the attendees' and exhibitors' impression of your event. You want truthful feedback to help you hone your event, but you also want positive reviews you can use in your marketing. Do you have a year-round engagement strategy? Getting people excited all year long should be a critical part of your marketing strategy.

Section 5: Measurement

There are many questions that can be included on an event survey to help determine if you met your audience's needs such as satisfaction rating questions. However, the true indicator of your event's success is, will they come back? Will they tell a friend to go? A Net Promoter Score is a good way to measure word of mouth potential. **Visit the Anber Agency site for more details on how to calculate this score, www.anberagency.com/philosophy.**

This document is created by Anber Agency, www.anberagency.com. Check out the Brand Building Experiences Blog for more reading on this topic, www.anberagency.blogspot.com.

Audience Content Matrix

Consider beginning this exercise with a Relevancy Statement such as: We are relevant to gourmet restaurant owners, head chefs, and restaurant distributors (exhibitors/sponsors of the event). We would like to increase our relevance to Wellness Center/Health Food store operators with cooking centers, places that offer cooking classes or demonstrations, personal chefs, and personal wellness coaches.

	Audience Type			
	Gourmet Restaurant Owners	Head Chefs	NEW: Wellness Center Operators	NEW: Personal Wellness Coaches
What they want	Grow their business/Run a financially successful business	Hone their craft	Grow their business	Promote Healthy living; grow their business
	Deliver what diners want and keep up with trends	Provide good food and keep up with trends	Improve clients' wellness and keep up with trends	Improve clients' wellness and keep up with trends
	Provide good dining experience to secure repeat business	The freedom to be inventive and creative	Provide enough value to secure repeat business	Provide enough value to secure repeat business
	Minimize operating costs	Get the best ingredients for the best price	Minimize operating costs	Make the service affordable

Food trends appeal to all of these groups and could be a foundational theme for the event provided it matches the show's goals. Inviting the leaders in the industry to speak on the foundational topics will strengthen the brand and the organization's authority on the subject. There are many other commonalities across all groups that could/should be addressed. The Head Chefs group appears to have unique content needs and could be treated differently with a special education track.

(NOTE: You could also build this matrix as "why they come", "what they need", or other pertinent questions instead of "what they want", as all could be valuable tools to help you meet the needs of your target audiences.)

Working With Presenters



Speaker Type Chart

Speaker Type	Help Them Meet Your Audience's Needs
<p>The Academic <u>Pros and cons:</u> He/she knows the material, is a subject matter expert, but presents numerous slides, and tries to deliver too much detailed information in the allotted time.</p>	<p>The Academic needs some one-on-one time with you and you should treat this as a partnership approach. To simply ask them to reduce their slide count will not resonate with them. You (or your moderator) can suggest different presentation technologies besides Powerpoint such as Prezi that help deliver complicated information in an interesting way.</p>
<p>The Self-Promoter <u>Pros and cons:</u> He/she will typically speak for free however expects to get business out of the opportunity.</p>	<p>If you ever receive feedback that a speaker was a self-promoter, do not invite them back! This hurts your brand and compromises trust with your attendees. Let the program guide, your website and mobile app include bios that will do the selling. Ensure that a “no sales promotion” policy is included in your Speaker Guidelines.</p>
<p>The One-Size Fits All <u>Pros and Cons:</u> The speaker doesn't really put in the effort to connect with your crowd and just gives a regular canned speech he/she would give anywhere.</p>	<p>Ask to see the presentation ahead of time and do not be afraid to ask for more personalization for your group. Suggest and share resources that can help him/her customize the presentation.</p>
<p>The Clown <u>Pros and Cons:</u> People love to laugh, however sometimes these speakers lack good content.</p>	<p>Ask for an outline with the 3-5 main key points the speaker expects to make to ensure there is some meaningful content.</p>
<p>The “Good” Speaker <u>Pros and Cons:</u> Attendees like them and give them better than average reviews. These speakers make an audience connection which is good, however they may be unwilling to evolve and try new methods since they don't feel they need to due to good reviews.</p>	<p>Ask him/her to be on your content/program committee so that you can enlist their good ideas for influencing other speakers to think outside the box. In doing so, they will evolve their own presentations.</p>
<p>The “I have to invite him/her to speak for political, etc. reasons” Speaker <u>Pros and Cons:</u> Having this speaker will help one of your colleagues with their goals, however, it hurts yours.</p>	<p>There is really no compromise when it comes to using the stage for favors. Suggest other outlets such as letting him/her lead small forum discussions, showing their logo on screen during walk-in to General Sessions, pre-record a video of them talking so it can be played how and when YOU choose and you can edit for time. This speaker's participation must be scripted by the event organizer.</p>



Speaker Guidelines Document

If your show has multiple speakers, you as the event organizer can save valuable time by creating one document that communicates expectations to everyone.

Elements in a Speakers Guidelines Document may include:

- Your key messages such as your show goal(s) and audience demographics.
- What you require of them, for example, asking them to send you the key points they plan to present and requesting they promote their talk through social media channels.
- Rules and Regulations such as no soliciting

The guidelines document as well as the customized communications approach with each speaker maximizes your control over how information is being presented and ensures a good attendee experience.

Presenting a Speaker Guidelines document if you haven't done so before does require some communications planning. You may receive negative feedback from speakers who will be inclined to resist some of the new pre-planning requirements, especially if they have spoken at your event in the past. The communications plan should inform your potential speaker pool in advance that changes are coming, explain the need for the change, and get them excited about your mission so they are prepared before receiving the new guidelines. You may ask internal speakers for assistance with reviewing the guidelines to get their buy-in early.



Moderators

Moderators add value to most educational sessions. In addition to creating continuity in how sessions are presented, having them in the seminar rooms during the sessions allows you to receive unbiased feedback about the speaker and the audience response. Moderators also can keep sessions on schedule, speakers on track, and ensure the speakers are covering the points the audience is expecting.

Your company staff and/or committee members can make excellent moderators with minor training. Once they are on board with your goals and the Speaker Guidelines, encourage them to reach out to their assigned speaker(s) in advance to prepare for the session. Provide examples to both speakers and moderators of new tools that may be available to them for delivering content or soliciting real-time feedback.



Paid Speakers

Paid speakers are just as accountable, if not more so, to deliver a great, worthwhile experience to the attendee as your non-paid speakers. Before signing a contract, review the Speaker Guidelines (or a modified version if more appropriate) with the speaker and ensure they are committed to delivering the experience you expect. Incorporate the Guidelines in their contract. Attempt as much as possible to pay them the smallest deposit they will accept up front. In working with them prior to the show, if you can tell their commitment to you and your event is not as you expect, you can terminate the agreement and not forfeit the entire fee.



Ongoing Speaker Engagement

To further ensure cohesiveness among the event's education programming, on stage entertainment, etc., it is helpful to set up a page on your website that is password protected and allows all speakers to interact. You can post the Speaker Guidelines, share the newest research on how to enhance learning (e.g. you can recommend books such as *Brain Rules* by John Medina). Creating an opportunity on-site at the event for them to mingle and meet each other would provide value for them and create a sense of community at your show.



Beyond Educational Speakers

In addition to educational speakers, there are many other elements that are part of a stage production including entertainers, award ceremonies, emcees, and regular company presentations.



Award Ceremonies

There are many ways to fully utilize an awards program to keep the audience engaged. Some awards are more appropriately given in person on stage, but not all awards have to be presented this way. Consider filming them ahead of time and editing the video to create more excitement and take up less time. You can even consider moving awards off stage altogether to a news/press conference area, or announcing the names during a General Session.



Company Presentations

Keep the audience engaged in company news updates by using pre-filmed video with content highlights or feature your company representatives through on-stage interviews with a moderator that will control the pace and timing of questions and answers.



Emcees

Finding a good emcee can be a difficult task. It is, however, important at most events to have someone who can keep a General Session or evening sit-down event moving forward, on schedule, and entertaining. Can you use someone already at the event such as another speaker or internal staff member? An emcee should have a sense of humor and be willing to work with you to positively contribute to the atmosphere you are trying to create.



Promotion/Fundraising

Understanding the atmosphere you want to create is an important foundation to a fundraising event. For example, a moving story is probably a better way to gain monetary commitments than a humorous story. If you determine the mood you want for your event and incorporate the right elements to match this, your attendees are more likely to feel a connection with your message.