



# CREATING THE

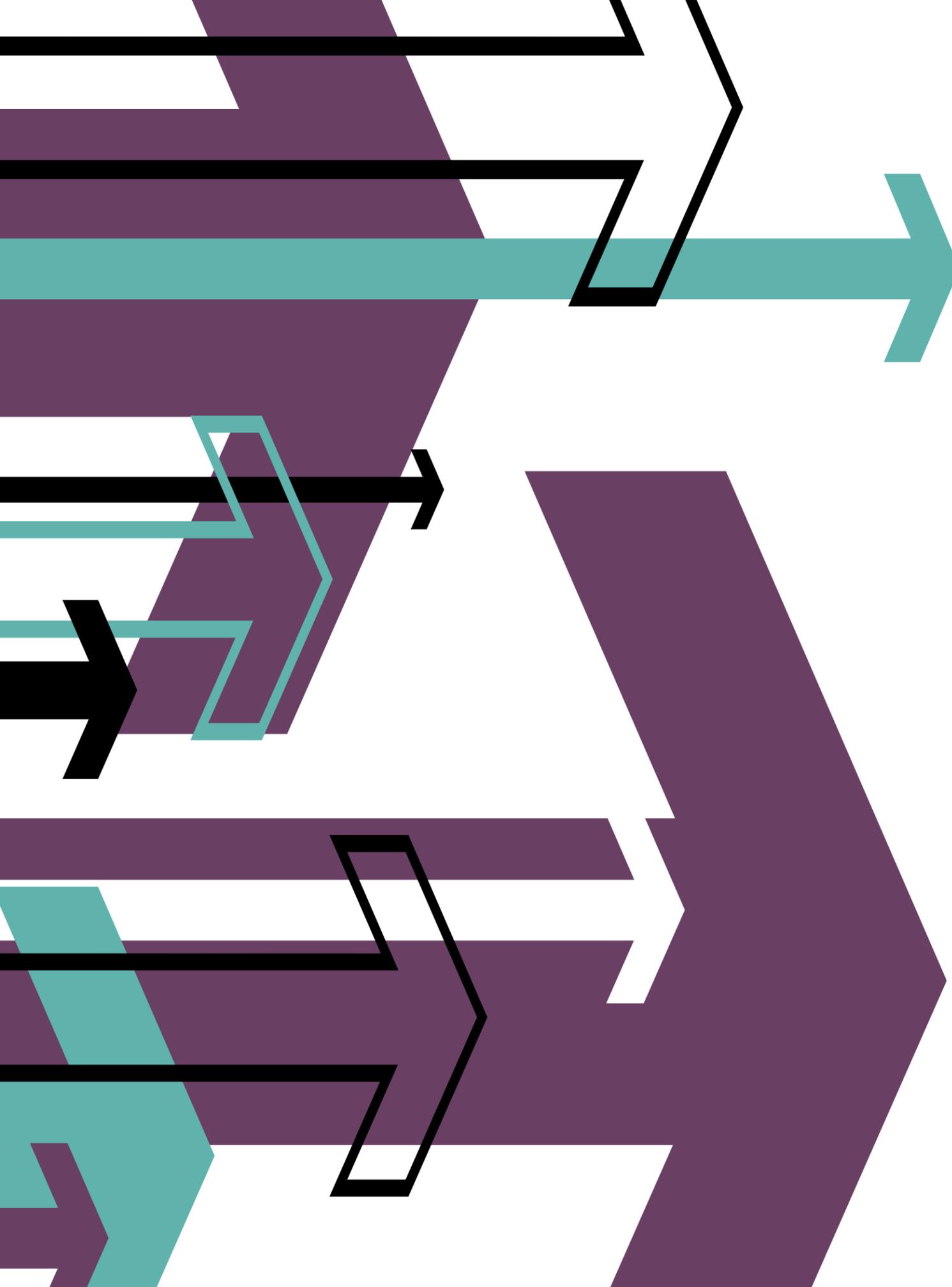
How to Deliver a Winning Event for Your Audience and Your Top Team

# PERFECT EVENT



MARK JEFFRIES





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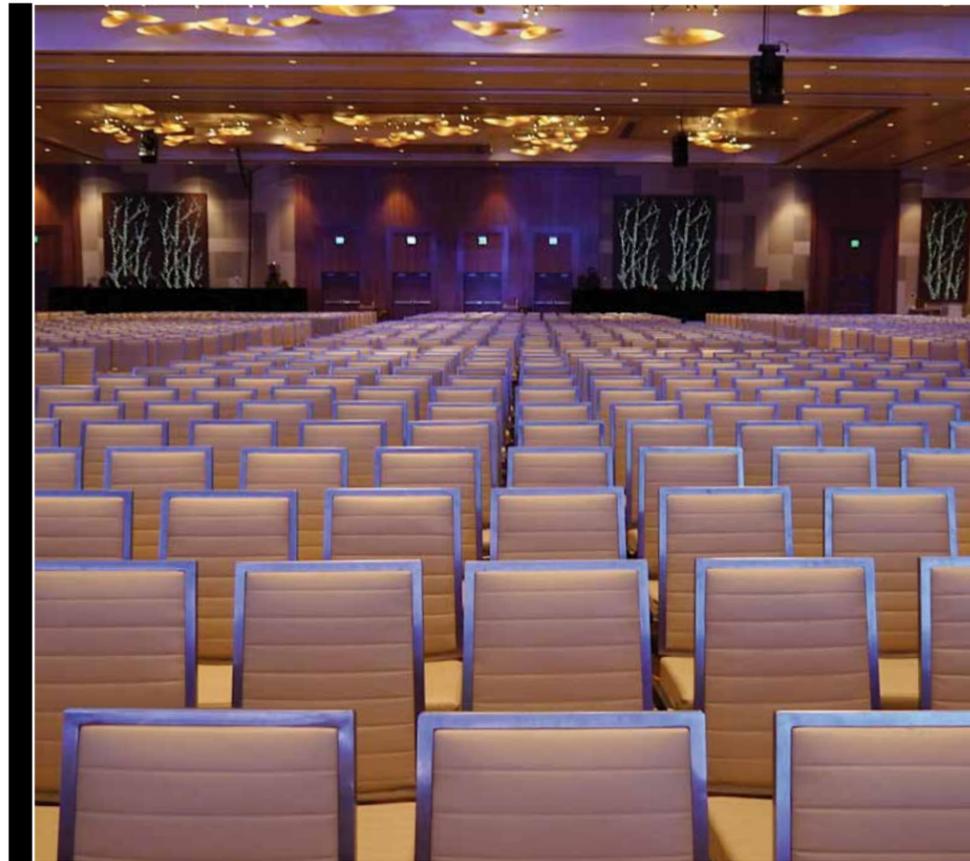
## ➤ section I - THE PLAN



I know you  
know this but...

You are putting this event on for your audience - not for your executives. YOUR objective may be to sell more of your cool products or fabulous services, but audiences come for their own reasons: to learn, grow, network and have fun.

Find the connection!



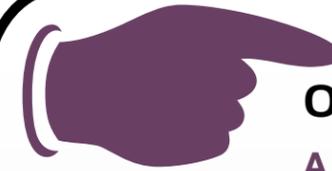
### Putting the audience first

Let's start where you should always start - with your audience. Who are they, what do they want, what are they thinking, what do you want them saying when they go home?

Your audience are people, just like you and me. They like to be informed, they want to grow, they like to be entertained, inspired and educated.

Your event must fulfill these very same objectives. Just because it is taking place in a darkened convention room doesn't change the rules! Just because members of your executive team have "always delivered" an hour-long, lifeless 'PowerPoint' presentation doesn't mean that your audience wants or likes it.

Success at your event is not a happy executive and a bored, uninspired audience... it's a happy executive and an **energized, motivated, inspired** and **informed** audience.



### Other key points about your audience

#### A staff or team event

It's important to consider that when staging a staff event, an event for your people, your audience divides into three - three clear sections that all have different needs. That employee audience is made up of **learners, vacationers** and **prisoners!**

Learners are the easy ones! They are ready and willing to learn something new, they will take copious notes, and they will contribute to all aspects of your event.

Vacationers will sit there looking quite relaxed, thinking to themselves, "well, it's better than a day in the office."

Prisoners will be sitting back, arms crossed and eyes rolling constantly. They didn't want to be here, they have no choice, and they are in that room against their will!

If you can win over the prisoners, make the vacationers sit up and take notice, and satisfy the hunger of the learners... You win!

#### A customer, client or user event

Something that often gets missed when putting together a customer event is what those customers truly represent to you and your management team. Yes, they are customers and they have already spent budget on you, your products and your services. However, they are, in fact, far more important than simply, an existing customer.

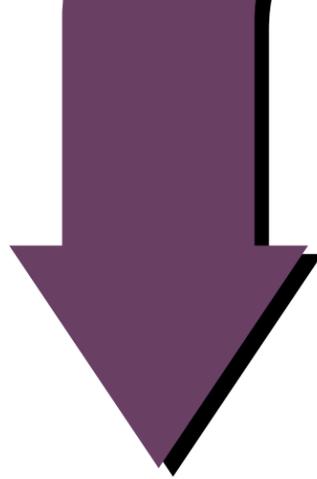
Without realizing it, they are also your potential, external sales team.

When they leave your event, what you want, more than anything else, is that they go back to base and tell your story. They need to be so excited by what they saw and heard at your event that they want to tell others about it.

So, you have a big responsibility. Not only must you tell your story and explain the value and benefits of your products and services, but you need to give them the language and the tools to retell that very same story to their people. They need to confidently walk into the office of the CFO and say, "This is why we need XYZ product."

They need the anecdotes, the analogies and the examples. They need to have heard your messaging, but in terms of their own business, objectives and needs.

So, remember - when putting together your messaging, ensure that you also put together a set of ideas and perspectives that will translate well into the businesses of your clients.



### The pre-event checklist

No matter what the size, as your event starts to come together, you need to create a checklist and ensure that you have a confident 'check' next to all of the following requirements. This is a bit like a manifesto - a promise to yourself and the team. As you go through the rest of the planning process, keep looking back at this list and ensure you are true to your word!



Objectives for Attendees - The Promise List	YES :)	NO :(
Will they grow their useable knowledge and skills?		
Will they have the opportunity to make valuable new contacts?		
Will their interest be kept alive - throughout?		
Will they believe the execs and acknowledge the credibility of the message?		
Will their real concerns be addressed?		
Will they leave more excited than when they arrived?		
Will they remember the ideas and concepts discussed?		
Will they feel included and involved?		

## ➤ section 2 - THE MESSAGE

### Your message and your top team

Now that you have a really good feel for your audience - the people who will ultimately decide the success or failure of your event - you and your senior team need to agree upon and finalize your key messages.

Sit with your team and before they start ranting about demos, or hearing from the CTO, or leaving time for the CFO to do yet another unfunny "skit", you need to set them a task.

There are two stages to the work needed to be done on the preparation questions below.

#### Stage I - Publish the questions

This is where you email your executive team with these questions and ask them to think about it and to create as many answers as possible in time for a key event-planning meeting "next week".



**Before you can produce a word of content, a notion of format, a shred of run-order, you must decide message and objective.**

**What are we saying and why are we saying it?**

#### Many of these questions need to be answered:

- What are we telling our audience?
- How and WHY is this different?
- What is the lead message we want them to take home?  
(If staff event...)
- Why should they want to continue working here?  
(Or if clients/customers/users...)
- Why should they remain loyal to us, our products and services?
- What are we doing for them?
- How will we show them we care?
- What mood do we want to create?
- What would they WRITE DOWN?
- What promises can we make?
- What truths can we share?
- What do we want them to do?
- What do we want them 'tweeting' and talking about?
- What behaviors are we encouraging?
- This time next year, where do we want to be?

Now, we both know that if they work on this "homework assignment" at all, it will be at the very last minute... But that's fine - you gave them the opportunity and they chose their response. Those who do the prep work, through the answers they create, will give you a clear impression of their objectives.

#### Stage II - The planning meeting

Create a mandatory planning meeting that will use their responses to the questions above as a roadmap for discussion and planning.

The importance of this team session, where the questions above actually get final answers, must not be underestimated.

This will, in fact, be one of the most valuable aspects of your work leading up to the event itself. Within this planning meeting, you absolutely need to have as many executive team members as possible present.

Use a professional facilitator to move this meeting forward as there will be a lot of voices, some fun and a little friction as well. You should also authorize people to speak freely, to challenge and most importantly to play the role of a cynical audience member.

#### HEARD IT ALL BEFORE!!

For example, consider the "homework" question, "What do we want them to do?" Firstly, ask your executives to come up with two or three action points that they believe are fair to ask of that audience. Next, ask other people attending the meeting to honestly challenge those ideas. Instruct them to act cynically (just like people in an audience can do!!). Encourage them to ask WHY and HOW and "But, didn't we do that last year?" Having someone "think" like a negative audience member and challenge an idea with the statement "We've heard it all before" is an excellent 'self-check' on the group's messages and ideas.

They and the moderator need to put your executives on the spot so that they are forced to fully think through their ideas - so that, by the time they are on the stage, they know what to expect and they have great responses ready to go.

This planning session will probably take longer than you had thought. However, this is time very well spent. It may even be decided to hold a follow-up planning session. That's fine - it's all good. Now that the executives feel that they have been a key part of the planning process, you will have far less trouble making things happen later on in the process!

Don't skimp on this session. Drive your executives hard to generate valuable, defensible and realistic content that will make this meeting even more successful.

## What next?

Hooray, you now have solid content with which to fill your upcoming event. You have the executive team on board and in agreement with what will be said. Next, however, you need to design the look and feel of your event. Remember, whether it's mandatory or invitation based, people will come to a meeting, they will sit down and they will expect (in terms of just what they see onstage) to be entertained and informed. They want to learn something new, take stuff away and leave smarter, more capable and better connected. So – how do you take all the ideas and messaging and turn it into an event??



## > section 3 - THE FORMAT

### Format - Think like a TV producer

Let's talk TV for a moment. Imagine you are watching a TV program and after a while, you realize that you are becoming incredibly bored. What do you do? You reach for the remote. What if you are online and you are watching an expert's video on YouTube and it is no longer relevant. What do you do? You click onto something else.

Your live audience does not have such easy freedoms... but they can and will mentally check out, they will stare at their smartphones or pop out for extended bathroom breaks.

Your obligation is to be like a TV producer and ensure that every minute is 'checking' one or more of these TV viewer checklist items on the right.

In fact, the cool TV shows now have elements of this entire checklist. They have news, discussion, public interaction, social media, entertaining segments, serious discussions and, most of all - it all keeps moving to maintain the viewer's interest.

### Lessons from going LIVE!

When I worked in morning television news, I learnt very quickly that a segment which, by all rights, had so much valuable content that it should have lasted 15 minutes was allowed just 5 minutes. At first I thought this was insulting for the audience until I realized that, actually, it was respectful. Respectful of their time, their requirements and their intelligence.

Use an example like NBC's Today Show or BBC Radio's 5 Live to help you create a running order and format that your live audience will appreciate.



**The most important aspect is to keep it moving. As soon as someone would normally be considering reaching for the remote, you need to be moving on! Consider every element of your running order from the perspective of the demanding audience member. *If they are still interested, they are still listening and that's all you need!!***



### The TV Audience Checklist

- Is it engaging?
- Is it visual?
- Is it relevant?
- Is it succinct?
- Is it clear?
- Is it entertaining?
- Is it compelling?
- Have we kept our viewer?

## Who Goes Where?

### Podium or panel??

Sometimes, it may be tricky or challenging to decide which of your executives and speakers would perform better within a panel and which of them you should allow to deliver a full presentation.

In the end, only you can decide these things, but I would have to say that if it is accepted across most of the organization that a certain executive is a compelling, entertaining or effective speaker - then he or she gets their own keynote.



Anyone else who has valuable content but simply doesn't possess these values, when it comes to making their personal presentations, can be effectively accommodated within a very watchable panel session or "Fireside Chat".

### "Don't you know who I am?"

Sometimes there are personalities involved and some rather delicate egos! When faced with this challenge, remember to explain to the executive in question that they are a content "owner". You have a more "visual" approach in mind for their key message. Removing from them the need to create a full presentation and instead allowing them to talk in a conversational, friendly and effective fashion, about their area of expertise, will add so much more value to the message.

Furthermore, with a good moderator driving the conversation forward, all of the points that this particular executive wants to make will be brought out through a smart line of intelligent and conversational questions.

### A bit of both

Sometimes, what works very well is what I term "The Letterman Approach". On Dave Letterman's show (and Leno, Conan, Kimmel etc.), the host will often invite on a comedian or a musical artist - they come on to wild applause, they do their act for about 4 minutes, then they wander over to the sofa for a little chat for another 4 minutes - making an enjoyable 8-minute segment.

This is also a very effective approach for the corporate event (obviously without the hilarity, house band and pumped-up audience) and, happily, it's also a great way to please your executive.

Let's say the executive's original plan was a 30-minute keynote with 74 slides. However, you know that it's just going to be a touch, shall we say, dry! You explain to him that he is still going to get about 30 minutes on stage (more like 25) but you are using the Letterman Approach to make his content even more watchable. He is now, you explain, going to come on and do 15 minutes of pure speech, then the moderator is going to invite him over to the "sofa area" to ask him some questions - the nature and content of which the executive is in control. Nice - everyone wins.

## External host/moderator/MC

Yeah, yeah. I know. This is what I do. That fact aside, I truly believe that this role forms an incredibly important part of the success of your meeting.

The event needs a heart. The audience need an honest, impartial friend and guide, and your team needs the expertise of someone who lives and breathes these events and can share the best practices of other organizations.

Your biggest concerns about an outside moderator or host will, most likely, be around credibility, knowledge and cost.

**"How on earth could this person possibly understand the complexities of our business (and its delicate personalities!!)? Surely it would be better to save that cost, use an internal person and produce a slightly cheaper event?"**

Valid concerns. However, it is key to remember that you are now producing an 'experience' for your audience. You are trying to show your products, services, message and your top team, in the best light.

**"But our Head of Sales is very funny."** Having an executive play the role of an event moderator might make THEM feel good, but it won't have the same effect on your audience.

**More importantly, you should never waste the expertise and insight of that executive by getting him or her to be asking weak questions of his colleagues when he or she should be answering strong questions from a moderator.**

### Insight, objectivity, experience

The event moderator should actually play many valuable roles for you. He or she should bring you great insight and ideas from the other top events they have hosted. Your moderator should be able to listen to the messaging and point out key elements that could be emphasized or that you may, indeed, have missed - after all, you have lived and breathed this event for the last four months and, sometimes, outside insight can be truly refreshing.

Your event moderator will help you handle the executives. As the live moment approaches, even the most senior people can start to panic or need additional guidance - an experienced moderator knows how to soothe, motivate, inspire and calm all at the same time. Your event host will ensure that even if things suddenly go "off plan", it will be rescued and repaired without anyone being the wiser.



I know you  
know this but...

Having your execs masquerade as a host or moderator either to save budget or to please the exec in question runs the risk of doing them a huge disservice. Instead of the audience seeing their brilliance as an expert, they see an amateur attempt at being someone they are not!!

Your MC will be the essential link between your audience, your executive team and that all-important message. He or she will be that credible outside voice, asking the right questions, helping your top team to shine, allowing the audience to hear the message and remember the points.

 **You should always use a lawyer in court, a teacher at school, a pilot to fly a plane and ... a moderator to run your onstage event!**

### The keynote speaker

This is normally a big investment and with that comes the potential for huge value but also for disappointment.

Typically, when your search begins, people within your organization will come up to you and say, "Oh, I saw this guy, he was so funny, you should use him". It's tempting to trust your excited colleague but you need to always do your own research, check full video clips, get actual testimonials and don't be afraid to ask to chat with the speaker before booking.



By the way, if speakers refuse to tell you about their speech or won't get on the phone for an "interview" call, before you book them, then that gives you a pretty good idea of what they will be like to work with on the day.

I always feel that a speaker who won't talk to you about their presentation before you "buy" is like a car dealer who won't allow you to test drive or even get into the car before you hand over the cash.

### Speaker agency vs direct

Unless you have a direct trusted connection, use a good speaker agency as part of your search. It won't cost you anything, they simply get about 20% of the speaker's fee if you book.

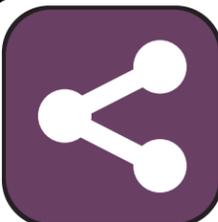
When I say a good speaker agency, I am referring to one that listens to your needs, asks questions about your event and people and offers you a tailored selection of relevant speakers.



The keynote speaker should give a presentation brimming with inspiration, value, tools and motivation and not just a mountain-climbing story tenuously connected to the importance of teamwork and determination.

The speaker must be able to entertain, inform, shed new light, thoughts and ideas... but MOST of all, provide "write-down facts" for your audience to take away and actually use. It needs to be practical, relevant, timely and connected to your audience's world.

In a recent article for Canada's *Corporate Meetings & Events* magazine, The co-founder and President of Speakers' Spotlight, Martin Perelmuter, said this about the new role of the speaker agency in a "tech-savvy" world...



We now live in a world that is far more connected than anyone could have predicted. Most speakers, authors, celebrities and media personalities not only have their own websites; they're on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn and for the first time interacting directly with their readers, viewers and fans. Most people these days, particularly those under the age of 30 who have "grown up" in the digital age, feel not only comfortable but empowered to reach out directly to just about anyone, and fully expect a response.

So how has this impacted the role of speakers' agencies and bureaus? I believe it has elevated their importance by changing their core function.

Today, anyone can go on the Internet and find hundreds, if not thousands of speakers on any given topic. The questions are:

- 1. How do you know if they are any good?**
- And perhaps more importantly:**
- 2. How do you know if they are right for your event?**

Agencies that define their role not as gatekeepers, nor as solely representing the interest of the talent they represent, can provide an incredibly valuable service. I believe the role of a speakers' agency or bureau is to partner with both the meeting professional and the speaker, with the ultimate goal being to contribute to the overall success of the event.

As with virtually every product and service, there are more options today than ever before. As with all relationships, I believe trust is the key, and finding trusted partners who know your events and audiences, understand how you work, and can provide solutions that can help you achieve your goals, is critical to ensuring that the speakers you put in front of your delegates or guests exemplify the values of your organization, are relevant, timely and in line with your objectives, and of course fit within your budget. Technology has provided us with incredible tools to help make quicker and more informed decisions. The power of strong relationships and trust, however, has never been more important.

So, you may well choose the direct approach and, sometimes, that will work. But if you are not convinced, bring in a reputable agency and seek their guidance and suggestions.

### Tailored content?

All speakers, when asked, will claim to shift around their keynote to suit your audience. In truth - most speakers are very used to giving a certain presentation. If they are forced to change content or order, it can throw them a little. As a result, most will SAY that they will make the changes but then, on the day itself, you won't really be able to tell!

Other speakers will make subtle changes in tone, references and examples to suit your people.

You have every right to discuss your objectives with the speaker, along with the nature of that audience, what they may have heard before their 'slot' and what they have reacted well to in the past. Take the time to have these conversations with the speaker and you will have an even more successful experience.

One word of caution, however – try not to micromanage the content. I have had many clients over the years who have been great at explaining the context of the event and the needs of the audience. However, there have been a few who are so panicky about the responsibility on their shoulders that they start trying to guess which elements of the keynote would work better than others, suggesting that I change the order, drop elements or use different terms and phrases. At that point I know we have a problem!

In the end, though, my role as a 'speaker' is to listen, fine-tune and (in this latter case) calm the storm, before delivering a winning keynote speech.

### Your speaker decision

The lesson to be learnt here is more about the choice you make before signing on the dotted line. Make sure you are happy with the speech as it stands as opposed to hoping that enough changes will be made for it to fit your objectives. In addition, reach out to TWO event planners (not agents!) who have recently used your proposed speaker within the last few months and ask them for honest feedback.

**PS. ALWAYS pay your speakers.**

***If you try to save budget funds by getting yourself some free speakers by just paying travel and expenses and making some vague promise about the quality of the audience, then you will get what you pay for. When you are not paying, you are saying: "Hey - I don't attach too much importance to this content or to you... just fill the time and then you can go home!"***

***The audience will see that in a flash.***

Two things happen when you pay.

1. You gain control. You earn the right to discuss and 'subtly' fine-tune the content and flow of the speaker's material - which is important for you and your event.
2. Knowing that he or she is actually being paid elevates the way the speaker views and behaves at your event. You will benefit from a more professional and focused speech and one that truly delivers value to your people.

## section 4 - YOU HAVE BUILT IT...

### ... but will they come?

#### Your pre-event campaign

Like a cool upcoming movie or product launch, you need to create a level of buzz as the event gets closer. This can be anything from short tweets (always with a well-planned and easy-to-remember hashtag) - to a series of short emails, a Facebook page, LinkedIn invites and more. As you know, though, demands on people's time are huge. Hoping they will engage with your live campaign and start pre-event conversations may be asking a touch too much! However, committing funds to a lively event web page with a stream of ever-updating tweets and plenty of graphics and information will create the kind of buzz you will be looking for. Try to encourage speakers and contributors to record 3-minute videos, teasing content, and place these front and center of your welcome page.

Even if you are creating a staff or employee event where everyone HAS to come, you still need to create the reasons for them wanting to attend. What will they learn, who will they meet, what might they see, how great will the networking be – and can you prove, this early, that you understand what questions they need answering and what talking points they will want to be part of??



Sell it online  
with tease  
lines like:

*"3 days that will  
show you the  
future of Business  
Analytics"*

or

*"Want to know  
what happens  
next? We will be  
opening the door  
and letting you  
see"*

or

*"How do the  
winners close  
those big deals???  
On March 9th,  
you will learn the  
secrets."*

### Theme – Don't worry about it!

Sorry about this, but your audience doesn't hotly anticipate what the theme of your event will be. After they go home, they do not really remember what the theme was. Only you do!

No matter how many "Reach for the stars", "Fast track for success" and "One team, all winners" banners, logos and boards you cover the conference room with, all the audience will remember is what they learn, what touches them, who they connected with, what made them laugh and what improves their chances of success.

This doesn't mean that you shouldn't have a theme – just don't blow the budget and pin all your hopes on that pretty signage near the registration desk.

### Tune in? Or tune out!

Away from the office, how does your audience like to consume their entertainment, grow their knowledge and find their inspiration? Just like you and I do!

They watch TV, they go online, they interact using social media, they read books, iPads and newspapers, and they meet up with friends and colleagues to gossip, share ideas and grow relationships.

If this is what they like to do, then this is what you need to deliver at your event!



Image courtesy of Drury Design

## > section 5 - ON SITE

### Respect the rehearsals

The one essential element of doing any panel or interview session is rehearsal.

Many of your senior people, once they arrive at the venue, can tend to go rogue or MIA. They arrange meetings, they decide to set up a permanent "networking" presence near the bar (!! ) - they have a multitude of conference calls with Europe and Asia... basically, you don't see them until minutes before they go on. That is also the time when they often pitch up with a thumb drive, announcing a whole new slide deck that "should be fine".



**One of your rules, as the fabulous event planner that you have become, is to create mandatory rehearsal sessions. They are in place because they work. Appearing onstage and being articulate, prepared and charismatic in front of a live audience of staff or clients is not CORE capability. It is a refined skill set that comes with a lot of experience.**

### *"But I've given this speech a hundred times!"*

You are going to hear this one a lot! Your execs have probably delivered their content many times before (by the way - sometimes that's even more dangerous as they have dipped, unknowingly, into a touch of complacency, and that way danger lurks!!)

Stand firm and make them visit the stage, get mic'd up and get a feel for things. Sometimes, they will happily come along, but they might not want to go through their entire presentation - and that's fine - but they MUST always block through each slide and each move, just to check that they and you are happy with the run-order.

### Full rehearsals

Here's where your external moderator and/or the production company become remarkably more valuable. They will guide the process, and the Executives will realize there was stuff they didn't know about. On the panel, for example, it's all about projection, timing, where you look, how to sit on "those" stools and the ability to shift from Presentation Mode to Conversation Mode.

Your role is to be present, to offer some guidance and to have some of your team sit in those empty audience seats and watch. Just having a few people out there adds to the effect of this part of the preparation.

When the executive has finished rehearsal, walk up to them - tell them what they did well and suggest a few areas of improvement. Keep it subtle and delicate here (think eggshells!!) - but saying nothing is worse!!

The rehearsal focuses the mind - it is a great reminder of what still needs to be done. Do not permit any of your execs, from the CEO down, to 'skip it'!!

## Timing

I cannot count the number of occasions event organizers have warned me that this executive or that marketing guy "never keeps to time". They have often given up even trying to maintain an accurate schedule. This is a huge mistake. Time is an asset and it is something which is very much in your control. As you know, every minute that exists occurs just once and never again. When an event's sessions routinely take time away from people, they are left feeling robbed. Even five minutes over and people instantly start to panic and grumble. They exit anyway and, most of all, they learn not to respect what you have so comprehensively laid out and printed up as a schedule.

Give the gift of time by ending ON time or even early and your audience will love you.

Solution - Don't just put a clock somewhere near the stage and hope for the best. Instead, invest in a clear countdown display with something impossible to miss like a flashing warning. In pre-event planning and rehearsal - with your onstage participants - announce that you are running this event as a live TV-style show.

If anyone goes over their allotted time, they are actively stealing time away from the rest of their colleagues.

In TV news, ending on time is called a "hard out" and is often dictated by the need to run news to the second or commercials at a key moment.

You, too, should also operate a "hard out". (OK, sometimes, for the good of an event or the message, you will choose to allow something to go on for a few more minutes - but once you have established your rule, you should stick to it!)

The ultimate control over an "exec gone wild" would be a (brave, but empowered) member of your team walking to the front and clearly giving a "wind-up" signal that some members of the audience will also see.

At one event that I hosted, the event team had been panned the previous year for allowing execs to ramble on for twenty or thirty minutes longer than their allotted time. So, they established a flashing red light on the actual podium and in two other places on the stage. I had to tell the entire audience that "This year, timing was everything!" and so when a speaker's time was up, the light would flash and they, as an audience, would have to applaud marking the end of that speaker's slot no matter what point he or she had reached!! Bizarrely, it actually worked and provided several moments of humor as well!

At another event - based in Orlando - the agenda was very clearly stated, and every attendee knew how much time they would need in order to leave the plenary sessions and make their way over to the varied breakouts that were taking place directly afterwards.

Two problems led to some major upset.

Problem one - Each speaker over-ran in a big way.

Problem two - Some of the proposed breakouts were more 'hotly anticipated' than the others, creating a competition for seats.

Result - People started quietly packing their stuff in the dark of the main plenary and subtly dipping out. A trickle led to a flood and before the final speaker had finished, half the room had made a 'run for it'!!



## Time is up!! 2.0

As technology moves on, there are other solutions to let your wayward speaker know they have overstayed their 'stage-welcome'. On the iPad, there is a very cool app called "iBanner HD". Basically, it allows you to type any message into it, and then it displays that very message as a scrolling marquee-style sign in bright red dots across the entire iPad screen - so that you can sit in the front row and communicate any message to the speaker and he or she will have no choice but to see it!

Also available is an IOS app that the professionals use called Show Timer, along with many other online options including this cool one: <http://www.online-stopwatch.com/countdown/>

However you choose to manage actual timing on the day, get executive buy-in on this issue (which they will all agree to as none of them realize that they breach time) and then stick religiously to it.



There are also some excellent table or row “networking/warm-up activities” that you can deploy at events of any size. I like to use “Find your Team”, or “Networking Neighbors - Big Brag vs White Lie” - email me if you would like to find out more: [mark@markjeffries.com](mailto:mark@markjeffries.com)

## > section 6 - OTHER EVENT IDEAS

### Celebrate staff or partner success with onstage stories

An audience forgets stats and will rarely remember a slide - but will always be able to fully recall a story. Stories are the heart of an event and the more stories you and your presenters can tell, the more their messages will be remembered. This leads to a great way to reveal, learn from and celebrate success.

For example - let's imagine you have five people from your sales team who performed brilliantly this past year. They conducted themselves in exactly the right way, used innovative tools, ideas and methods and won a lot of new business. Presumably, you would like the rest of the team to learn from these fine examples?

Put your star performers on a panel - answering questions on how they did it, what approach they used, what worked, what didn't work and what their advice would be to their colleagues in the audience. Allow them to briefly tell their story, guided along by the panel moderator. This works well on a number of levels - mostly, by releasing them from the ordeal of having to create and deliver a stand-alone presentation and instead allowing them to shine using this very 'visual' and relaxed approach.

### Intelligent brain breaks

(a.k.a. brief but welcome audience competitions)

Regardless of the intellect of your audience - everyone needs a break from the relentless streaming of information. An occasional stretch break combined with a bit of competitive fun creates a breath of fresh air and a “mind-reset” for your audience. One super-easy and wonderfully engaging game that I deliver to audiences around the world is Heads and Tails. Nothing radically new here, but when done with some intelligent humor, a vibrant onstage host and some great up-to-date questions, this really is a remarkable way to wake up your audience, create a touch of actual movement and offer an opportunity to laugh, shine and win...

### Awards

I have had the pleasure and honor of MCing many awards sessions for various clients across every industry. The best events, the most successful, are always the ones that respect the audience. Once again, it's all about timing. Keep it short and make it sparkle. If you have too many awards to give out - spread the award moments throughout the day or across the evening.

### End of day - Q&A

I like the idea behind bringing everyone back together for a Q&A session. It actually offers executives a chance to say stuff they had forgotten earlier, and it gives the audience (who are now fully warmed up) an opportunity to clarify different talking points or ideas.

In terms of how attendees can ask questions, this always works well: Make sure that your event MC or moderator regularly reminds the audience that if they think of a cool question, they should write it down on a card (which you have provided on every chair) or they can email it on to a temporary email address or, indeed, raise their hand live in the sessions.

Using this approach, you have covered every base. The beauty, however, of having offered the 'card' option is that your host can walk around the audience waving his stack of card questions, even though your top team may well have 'inserted' a few questions that they really want to address!! Always plant a “basic” common-sense question into your audience. The psychology is very simple - people don't want to 'broadcast' a gap in their knowledge so they often won't ask what's on their mind. However, when they hear someone else ask a really basic question, it suddenly gives them the confidence to ask their question - which usually is a lot better!!

## Feeding the masses

### Coffee breaks/lunches/cocktails - i.e., NETWORKING

You may well be under huge amounts of pressure from the Products, Marketing, Sales or Service team - all of whom want more and more time on the stage, but you must resist.

Amongst the top reasons people attend events is always the “opportunity to network”. The chance to meet people who do what they do or who could help them do what they do even better is extremely valuable. When breaks and lunches are cut short by over-running or over-planned sessions, your attendees are not happy.

So, be the perfect 'networking-enabler'. Set aside solid, untouchable time for those attendees to meet and connect.

At a number of the larger customer events I moderate, the event teams set up either geographical networking sessions or industry networking sessions... or both! You might find a way to try this approach too - any effort pays off.

After many years of speaking at and moderating conventions, I have also been told by pretty much all of my clients that the ideas that I deliver onstage around networking and making new connections end up serving not only as valuable content, but also as a timely icebreaker! Delegates suddenly have something common, to all of them, that they can try out on each other!



I know you  
know this but...

No matter how  
compelling your  
content or speakers,  
by 3.30pm, people  
need sugar!! Let  
them eat cake!  
Or some decent  
cookies/chocolate/  
snack bars

Whether it's business-card etiquette, the perfect handshake, the 3R's of networking or the L-WAR of communication, there is always something that can be used.

Your role as the event coordinator is, therefore, to always facilitate, as much as possible, valuable opportunities for your guests to meet each other, learn about each other's businesses - or teams - and hopefully create networks, the value of which will always be associated with your organization and your event.

At every step throughout your upcoming event, try to enable great opportunities for people to meet, mingle, share stories, connect and build relationships.



### Special note on food:

You have major budget pressure - everyone does! However, try NOT to skimp on the food! Delegates truly care about the treats at coffee time and the food at lunch and will very quickly form some class-action whining when they feel mistreated.

In my opinion, the most important test is the afternoon break. Give them what they need (Energy!) and they return to session revitalized, ready to listen and feeling positive!

## > section 8 - CONCLUSION

This is not actually the end at all - more like the beginning. There is no perfect approach that guarantees success. After all, you are dealing with variables - stuff that can go wrong!! You know... Executive personalities, hotels, flights, lighting, food, badges, signage, slide decks, projectors, AC, chairs, sets, microphones, walks of shame, partying too hard, awards, dinners, galas, dancing...

For every person who loves it, there's another just waiting to complain - but that's fine. That's human nature or "delegate nature" - it's just what happens.

One of my clients summed up event psychology like this - she said (while watching delegates trying to find breakout rooms),

"It's like when they check in to the event, their brain checks out of their head."

LOL

It's more like people are actually happy to be led for a while - happy to have someone set it all up for them. When they get to make fresh contacts, learn something new, be entertained, feel welcome, be well-fed and made to feel special - they like it.

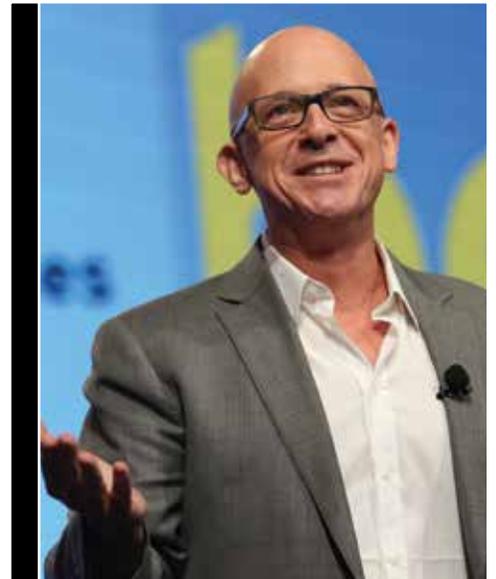
This is why great preparation and an innovative and simple approach wins every time. Be ready for what might go wrong, be ready to give your audience what you know they actually want and, after everyone has gone home, be ready to be thanked by your top team and be ready to read some great evaluation numbers.

"Walk-in music, playing... Everyone ready?... Open the doors!!"



## MARK JEFFRIES

A former Merrill Lynch stockbroker turned author and keynote speaker, Mark Jeffries has become a trusted adviser and communications consultant to some of the world's largest and most successful organizations. He speaks at and moderates conferences, summits, sales meetings, user forums and conventions all over the world for clients including IBM, Ernst & Young, SAS, HP, Zurich Insurance, Gartner, Microsoft, Royal Bank of Canada, Merrill Lynch & Bank of America.



With his depth of event experience, many of Mark's clients now also use him as an event consultant, working alongside the production team to create an event with audience appeal, a memorable impact and an effective message.

Dividing his time between the United States, Canada and Europe, Mark's ideas, inspiration and guidance are sought across virtually all industries.

### At your event

As an economist, former stockbroker and TV host, Mark brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the events he speaks at and facilitates.

A true all-rounder, Mark is an entertaining and experienced MC, an incisive and knowledgeable facilitator able to quickly master the intricacies of business within any industry and a popular speaker with a "hugely entertaining" and "immensely practical" keynote presentation entitled "The Art of Business Influence - Selling without Selling".

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Mark has also just published a highly innovative, cloud-based virtual training product - **The Art of Business Influence - Selling without Selling** - the ultimate guide to Communication Excellence, this engaging and practical online course is designed to turn all users into Persuasive Communicators, Key Influencers and Trusted Advisors.

**Find out more at [www.markjeffriesca.com](http://www.markjeffriesca.com)**