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5 Top Strategies for Maximizing the Impact of Internal *and* External Speakers at your events

By Andrea Driessen, Chief Boredom Buster

For most organizations, speaker and entertainment talent for meetings and events represents one of--if not *the*--largest line items in the budget. To make the most of your substantial investment—whether you rely on internal [industry] experts, and/or you hire external talent for keynotes, breakouts and evening fun—read on for **five effective and easy-to-implement ways to maximize your returns.**

1. MESSAGE CONTINUITY CONFERENCE CALL.

To create more message continuity and reinforce the most important concepts your audience needs to succeed after the meeting, hold a conference call *early on* in your planning process. Invite all keynote speakers *and* breakout session presenters, and anyone else who will have a significant role in sharing expertise at your meeting.

Give each participant an opportunity to share their content plans, and ensure everyone's on board with ways to unite and align messages for more impact. This call also ensures that any content redundancies or contradictions are known and cleared up ahead of time, so that you can **make the most of every minute.**

With information overload so common in nearly all meetings these days, the more you focus on just two or three key "meta message" take aways, the more your participants will retain overall...and the more effective your meeting's **return on investment and return on objective.**

Trying to do too much means very little sticks. Often, we communicate more (and more of it is *remembered*) when we *communicate in a more strategic, streamlined, and unified way.*

2. TELL A CENTRAL STORY.

Most often, what your audience members need is NOT more information [we've got plenty of that, thanks]...instead, they need to be more *engaged with information that is thoughtfully and consistently shared*. And a key step toward that engagement is to tell a **consistent, central story** at all your meetings.

Whether your agenda consists of internal speakers or external speakers, be sure *everyone* understands the central story you're aiming to tell [which can be effectively shared at your Message Continuity Conference Call], so that each attendee is on board with the **"what" and the "why"** behind the shared messaging.

In other words, what is the **key story line** you want your meeting participants to remember? If you're telling too many stories, or if the story lines *conflict*, attendees too will be conflicted, confused and perhaps even feel *disconnected* from your organization and its mission.

An example of a "central story" could go something like this:

"Our organization will double its sales by 2010 by lowering expenses 15% and by increasing market share by 25%."

So, for maximum effectiveness, *all* messaging should *reinforce*, and *not contradict*, these goals. It also means you make time in the meeting to highlight *organizational stars* who are succeeding at these goals....*and* giving air time to incentives and examples of how *others* can succeed at reaching these goals as well.

3. BOOKENDING.

Start *and* end your meeting by reinforcing the theme, key goals, and/or key message take aways with some form of **distinctive, unifying program, skit, or music that ties an emotional and metaphorical ribbon around the all the elements** of your agenda, whether your meeting is four hours or four *days* in length. This will create a more memorable, understandable, and even poignant structure around all program elements.

Perhaps the conference started with a kick off keynote, in which you announced a new company initiative. How about ending the event with an "all-hands-on-deck" company anthem, customized for your organization, and featuring your new initiatives...to send everyone off on the highest possible note?! Contact us to find out how.

4. SPEAKER "TRACKS."

If you're holding a larger conference with a number of distinct breakout session topics and groups, divide the programming into subject matter "tracks" to reinforce categorical take aways and give memorable, on-point structure.

We humans crave order and structure—we know intuitively that thoughtful structure will also serve to lessen information overload. Using message tracks also provides a framework around which you can build **"sub-plots" of your central story** [see strategy #2, above]...and gives meeting participants a better understanding of *their*

specific role with telling the larger overall story and reaching the goals that your leadership has set out to accomplish.

5. THE LAST SUPPER.

Maximize group time during the meeting's last meal—and ensure **measurable, practical results** for participants long after the meeting. This can include finding a creative way to pair participants (by seat numbers, napkin colors, raffle tickets etc.) and explain that they have just met their "**Accountability Buddy**" for the next 30 days.

Then, ask each buddy to *write down three specific, manageable tasks or goals related to the meeting content and your central story that they will commit to completing in the next 30 days...*with at least one check in with their buddy half way through to follow up and improve results.

You'll gain immeasurable buy-in from attendees who've *made a **critical, in-person connection they would not have outside the meeting, and build stronger results tied to meeting content.***

You could also announce that one month after the conference, as a special service to conference attendees, you'll all "reconvene" virtually as one large group to report back on your "goals-met" results.



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