

Three Simple Steps to Create Better Meeting Experiences

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Designing for a more engaging experience for your meetings can significantly improve performance from both a business and attendee vantage point. Yet, this is more difficult to do in today's world due to a host of challenges, including budgeting constraints and increased risks for attendee distractions. From the moment an attendee walks into a general or breakout session, the need to immediately capture attention is just as important as maintaining engagement during the entire experience. So, how can a meeting planner create better engaging meeting, event or incentive experiences? Here are three areas to consider:

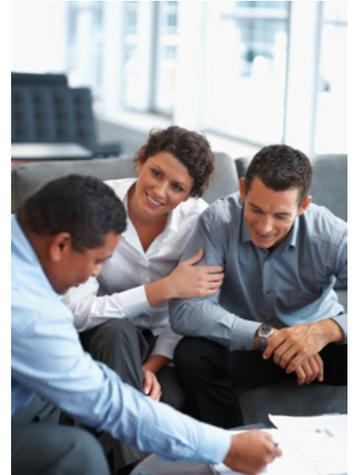
Deliver the Right Content

Ever run into a situation where you have a content-rich agenda but aren't quite sure how to deliver it effectively? This happens a lot. While the core objective of your program involves communicating and connecting key messages with your audience, the challenge is to ensure you do so using the best possible approach. To be more effective, consider the audience. For instance, a lack of engagement during a meeting can occur in situations when content is not delivered effectively or simply doesn't strike audience interests. Testing and gaining audience member insights during the design stage of your program can prove highly valuable in creating and delivering on your key objectives in more meaningful ways for attendees.

For organizations that are on strict budgets, gaining audience insight and feedback is even more important. Lisa Marie Collins, a producer with Freeman – a Maritz Travel partner, also suggests that, "When designing your program, consider going beyond just surveying the audience to find out what topics they're interested in. This is also an opportunity to engage attendees leading up to the event. Asking attendees to submit questions in advance, for instance, can help create buzz and excitement earlier and assist in better connecting with speakers on content and delivery."

Set the Stage

Maritz Travel recently co-produced an event with its partner, Destinations by Design. Tami Hance, vice president for Destinations by Design, really helped create impact the instant an attendee entered the room. According to Tami, everything counts when you're setting the stage for a truly engaging meeting. And, creating a conversational atmosphere can help spark strong, sustainable engagement from beginning to end. This requires a need for instantly capturing and retaining the audience members' attention throughout the experience. The use of lighting, colors, and alternative seating arrangements such as lounge settings, table inlays, stage footprints that are just slightly higher than seating levels and go into the audience are examples planners can leverage to better connect with and engage attendees. It's through these types of efforts that you're able to instantly capture the audience members by surprise and captivate their attention throughout the experience. Attendees, in turn, experience an at-home atmosphere while being better immersed and connected to your meeting through a much more memorable engagement.



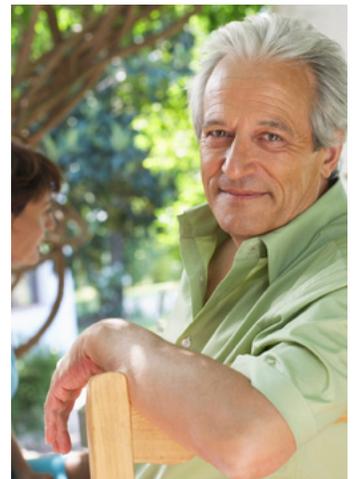
Is this something that is possible from large, general sessions to smaller breakout sessions? Of course it is. As Tami puts it, "It's all about creating continuity through the theming and presentation of each room. There's also the opportunity to divide larger general sessions into diverse seating options. You don't have to be uniform throughout the room. The front, mid and back portions of the room can have diverse options, leave it up to the audience to determine where they want to participate from and engage you."

As you can see, there are a number of options available when setting the stage, it just requires thinking differently about what you can do that best positions your program for achieving and exceeding expectations – even if it's a breakaway from past traditional practices.

Incorporate Distractions

Audience multi-tasking during presentations can be a performance killer. While it's a situation that's always presented itself, it's been amplified these past few years mainly by increased mobile device capabilities. Email, texting, social media and various apps provide audience members temptation, convenience and discretion. Attempting to limit distractions by asking attendees to "Please silence all cell phones!" really doesn't work. So, why not embrace it instead? Consider ways by which you can incorporate mobile to further create engagement. Polling the audience, texting questions and creating a social following before, during and after presentations can create richer experiences that help further inform, excite and engage audience members.

If performance expectations must continue being met, if not exceeded, meeting professionals need to think more about the experience they're creating for the audience. Whether a meeting or event attendee, or an incentive travel participant, creating a more aligned, engaging and interactive experience can greatly benefit from these approaches. If you're looking for even better impact, consider integrating all three into your next program for outcomes that are more meaningful and memorable for your business and your audience.



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