



Conference Rhythm

Simple ways to get your event hitting the right beat



Introduction

Event managers recognise the challenge: throughout the year there will be several events where vital information is communicated. It may be a product launch to partners and distributors. It may be an internal conference to communicate corporate strategy. Or it could be a kick-off meeting to review the past year and motivate and build the team. What all these events have in common is the need to engage with the audience: to be stimulating not soporific.

In this document we will be looking at simple ways to breathe life into your events: to add light and shade, interest and variety while still keeping on track.

Determining Objectives

Firstly, just as with any other communication: **DEFINE OBJECTIVES AND MESSAGES** and consider how the event will be **MEASURED**. Then decide the most appropriate method of communication.

Executives have a variety of media through which they can communicate – it may be that the information does not merit a face-to-face meeting – in which case a general announcement, e-mailed video broadcast or printed newsletter would be sufficient.

However, corporate changes of direction, business plans, teambuild initiatives or product launches are often so complex and important that only a symbolically significant event, such as a conference, will suffice. In these circumstances it is doubly important that the event is memorable, communicates effectively, shows a wise use of budget and reflects the nature of the communication.

Companies should also consider who will run the event. Do you have the time, authority, resources and expertise to manage events in-house? If not, and you feel the need for creative and fresh ideas then consider hiring professional help from an event management or production agency.

Finally set a realistic budget.

Content and Delivery

Getting content right is frequently fraught with political difficulties as managers vie for the most visible slots. Sometimes those with corporate authority are not the best message ambassadors and don't have anything pertinent to include. Using a professional third party will often diffuse and manage potentially damaging conflicts of interest. Consider:

- Does the presentation add value and meet the objectives of the event? If not don't include it.
- Don't be talked into including presenters because of their seniority.
- If for political reasons they have to be included, look at deploying them elsewhere. For example would they make a good facilitator or after dinner speaker, or could they participate in a Q&A or interview, or run a workshop?
- Offer the support of a scriptwriter to align each presentation to the theme. Depending on the skill of the presenter and the content, it could range from a verbatim script to a simple outline.
- Insist presentations are concise and punchy. Provide realistic deadlines for submission. That way you can ensure they focus on the key messages while leaving you time for any necessary tweaks.
- Insist that presenters attend rehearsals.

Engage and be Memorable

Having established that the content is pertinent, engaging, focused and meets your communication objectives the next step is to concentrate on the programme. How do you prevent it becoming predictable and monotonous? How do you ensure your delegates feel motivated, informed and that their time has been well spent?

8 rules to deliver rhythm to your conference:

1. Don't fall into the trap of trying to cram too many back-to-back presentations into each session. People can only absorb a certain amount of material before suffering information overload.
2. Consider taking delegates out of the conference room for their presentations. Fresh and different surroundings will lead to far greater information retention.
3. Ensure the running order tells a consistent story, built around recurrent themes.

4. Look at how the day is balanced in terms of presentations, breakouts, entertainment and heaviness/lightness of content.
5. Provide regular refreshment breaks so delegates have time to relax and absorb the information.
6. Consider a professional facilitator. These can be worth their weight in gold as they will provide interest, impartiality and authority whilst maintaining focus and direction.
7. Similarly provide plenty of opportunity for networking as this is often cited as one of the key benefits of face-to-face communication.
8. Look at how you can creatively support each presentation (video, acts, celebrities, music, graphics etc).

5 ways to ensure your messages are memorable:

1. Where appropriate look at involving the audience. You cannot win hearts and minds without engaging people – and you cannot engage if communication is all one-way.
2. If you are considering teambuild ensure it is appropriate for the audience and adds further value to your communication.
3. Allow plenty of time for Q&A. If your delegates are reticent, have some questions the facilitator can pose, or consider using interactive technology, Q&A boards or group discussions to get thoughts flowing.
4. If your audience has different communication requirements look at how workshops and breakout sessions can be utilised.
5. And of course we mustn't forget the social side of a conference, which rewards delegates and provides that all-important opportunity for networking. Whether we're talking a gala evening, a dinner in a restaurant, a party or an evening at a sporting event, treat entertainment as an integral part of your communication.

Summary

Conferences are used to communicate vitally important messages to staff, partners and clients. All too often poor planning, misuse of budget or too frequent repetition of a past idea results in a failure to engage and excite.

To achieve a balanced production, that flows professionally and smoothly, yet maintains momentum and gives a sense of anticipation calls for considerable skill, creativity and authority. Whilst some organisations have many of these skills in house, investing in the right production agency can strengthen the team, diffuse politically difficult situations and provide a wealth of ideas that can mean the difference between money invested wisely and false economy.

About Mirage

Mirage is a full-service live event management and production company.

We continue to delight clients, and exceed expectations, for the simple reason that Mirage does not produce events to a formula. We tailor our creativity to meet your brief and create a memorable, vibrant event, which is professional without being predictable. We help define your objectives, refine your messages and then we inject fun, velocity and life into your content, ensuring your key messages are understood, reinforced and embraced.

Mirage has an impressive portfolio of blue-chip clients whose events range from product launches, conferences, roadshows, business forums, AGMs through to themed parties and fun days, award ceremonies, team-building and motivational activities. Our complete range of services includes venue selection, programme content, logistics, staging, print and electronic media, delegate management, guest speakers and celebrities, video conferencing, speaker support and AV.

To learn more about how your events could have greater impact, relevance and creativity call us on +44 (0) 1883 740400, email diane@mirageemail.com or visit our website at www.miragewebsite.com or www.mirageparties.co.uk.



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