

14

Industry Insights

Phil Crowther

Learning objectives

- Interpret the connections between the practitioners' words and the themes of the book.
- Identify the links between their different stories.
- Reflect upon how their accounts differ from your views of the role of event creators.

Introduction

Throughout this book we have tried to make the voice of industry prominent. This chapter is the pinnacle of this with anecdotes from six senior event professionals sharing their personal reflections about the business of event creation. The world of events is rich with exceptionally talented people designing and delivering incredible events. Refreshingly these people also recognise the importance of guiding and inspiring the event creators of the future (you) and have kindly taken time to contribute to this book.

In such an experiential area as events there is always a danger that a divide opens up between the classroom and what is sometimes referred to as the 'real world'. It is very important that students of events engage with both, to ensure their learning is grounded and applied. The theory, concepts and arguments introduced in books cannot justifiably exist without connection to the practicalities of the event industry. It is hoped that the views of professionals expressed below support readers to interpret their event management education in the context of the real world.

The commentaries are not displayed in any particular order and are largely copied and pasted directly from what the authors provided. They have not been edited so as to preserve emphasis and meaning. At times they read as a stream of consciousness as the authors simultaneously reflect upon their experiences as they write. Similar to students who struggle to find opportunity to put their learning into practice, practitioners often struggle

to find time to reflect upon their practice. It is therefore hoped that this has been, and will be, an equally useful exercise for both writers and readers.

The contributors were asked to share their insights, gained from years of event creation experience, and to openly express their views with the event creators of the future. It is notable when reading through the accounts below that the writers come from varied and specific event contexts; corporate, agency, festival, and destination marketing. A challenge for readers is to interpret their views and assess how they can be transferred to other event contexts. For the most part this is entirely possible and useful.

Industry insights

Mark Shearon, Managing Partner, Proscenium, New York
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With regards to event strategy and event design we ALWAYS start at the end. What do our clients want to happen at the conclusion of their program? With clients like Harley-Davidson, Walmart and Boeing the stakes are high, millions and sometimes billions of dollars are in play.

Therefore the business outcome of any program is paramount. That is the value we bring as live event producers to our clients' events. So those goals and objectives need to be agreed with the client up front. What do they want their target audience to commit to do? How do we get them to commit to buy a product or service, or if an internal audience, how do we get them to commit to a vision or a plan? Gaining commitment from an audience is our primary reason for existing. And it is much more powerful than experiential or engagement. One can be engaged but actually not do anything. Only to commit is to truly act. And action should be the outcome of any event that we as strategists take if we are going to help the companies that we work with to obtain business outcomes from their live programs.

How do we extract those business outcomes? Well, great questioning technique is very important. Asking the right questions and the right proportion of closed and open questions is key, but the most important skill you will need as an event strategist and designer is to be able to LISTEN. You have two ears and one mouth; please use them in that proportion. Listen closely to your clients and really get to the core of what they are asking of you.

Once we have a draft of desired outcomes we need alignment, so we socialize those internally within the client company. All stakeholders (and

influencers) must sign off on the objectives of the program before we move forward with the strategic direction and design concepts.

Once we know the desired end result, only then can the design process start. We assemble strategists, creatives, writers, designers, art directors and producers. Event design is not a solitary sport; it is a collaborative process between teams of subject matter experts and our clients.

So know what you want people to say and do after your event. Know what stakeholders expect as a result of the program. Create ‘filters’ that you can pass through any of the ideas that you come up with. In this way you can ensure that you do not waver from your strategic plan. Objectives come first then strategy then design and execution comes last.

Many people have asked me, with strategy and execution, which is the most important? Let me leave you with a little fable: Strategy and Execution walk into a bar and immediately spot a Client. They both do their best to impress, but Client lets them know, “Tonight it’s all about Strategy.” Dejected, Execution starts to walk away, but Client says, “Wait, your day will come.” And that was the start of a beautiful Partnership. Oh, and for a “twist” – Strategy and Execution turn out to be twins so Client could never tell them apart – and never really needed to.

Ann Palmer, Director, Event and Roadshow Marketing, Barclays Bank

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Excellence in execution will always be fundamental to producing successful events, however true added value for stakeholders comes when event teams engage at a more strategic level. In simple terms, strategic input means translating the business objectives into memorable and engaging live experiences for hosts and guests. In addition to understanding a wide breadth and depth of event solutions, events teams have to invest the time to learn about their respective industry and stakeholders in order to match the business objective with the event solution, and serve credibly in this strategic advisory capacity.

Acting as a strategic advisor begins with first understanding the business products and services as well as the nature of interaction with clients and prospects. With a broader understanding of the client relationship, event teams can make targeted recommendations about the best type of event solution to bring to life a particular message in a meaningful way that will attract the client’s attention, enough to attend and ultimately retain the message.

The 'strategy' might come in the overall event solution or sometimes in a single element, i.e. the speaker. The opportunity for impact lies in determining what is 'meaningful and engaging' for each audience; and rarely do we find it is the same. Events have to be increasingly clever about what 'creativity' looks like, bringing fresh ideas at competitive costs. Remember also that events are not static activities. The events teams have to work with the business from concept to completion, continually monitoring progress, delegate interest and adapting as needed as the event approaches.

Beyond single event touch points, event activity should be integrated with wider communication and marketing campaign plans to achieve a greater, longer-lasting impact where it makes sense. With knowledge of the client life-cycle, and working collaboratively with the business, event teams can again offer strategic guidance as to how and when to promote various event initiatives.

It is important to remember that strategy is important for all events regardless of scale and format. The same principles apply.

Maurice Fleming, Managing Director, Shelton Fleming Associates Ltd
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A working day in the events industry is as changeable and varied as the array of events you will produce. Just as each event is an individual in shape, size and style, so is maintaining the relationships with varying clients and partners, each coming with their own set of values and challenges.

The core tasks of producing a high quality event revolve around strategy, implementation and delivery on a brief. However, the essential skills to maintain a successful business in events rely upon your ability to also continually please your clients. In most cases these two challenges run in opposition to each other. Often the client can be an obstacle to their own desired results, for example, requesting last minute changes, rethinking design preferences, cutting finances, questioning strategy, changing timings and limiting staff. You will never face quite the same set of obstacles with a client.

Different events and live experiences have very different methods for measuring their success. The events industry is as transitional and diverse as the experiences you create. As well as creating these continually different environments you must also adapt and recreate a form of analysis in order to feedback to clients, making it more complicated than other single discipline marketing outlets each with their own standardised ROI indicators.