Amping Up Attendee Engagement
How to make the meeting experience more rewarding for all

by Debi Scholar, CMP, CMM | April 01, 2015

TAKEAWAYS

• Communicate with your attendees via different formats and media, taking into account age, personality type and learning style.

• Experiment with different presentation formats and meeting styles.

• Provide ample opportunities for collaboration among attendees, suppliers and the local community.

• Use results-driven metrics to quantify success and return on investment.

The following checklist was created by Debi Scholar, CMP, CMM, a corporate meeting planner and expert in strategic meetings management. She is based in Scotch Plains, N.J.

Prepare for Success

• Attract more attendees by learning the communication preferences of traditionalists (pre-baby boomers), baby boomers, Gen-Xers and Millennials. Influence each generation before and during the event through communication methods they prefer.

• Source the right location, venue and activities during the right seasons on the right days. Consider the impact and risk of extraordinarily hot or cold weather, inadequate venues and other problematic possibilities.

Enhance content and structure

• Make sure that your emcees, speakers or facilitators are proven at their craft. Encourage storytelling to take your attendees on an engaging journey. Nothing ruins a meeting more than a boring, monotone speaker with minimal expertise; credibility will be lost within seconds.
• Alternate session formats -- and be bold. Experiment with role plays, games, group discussions and demonstrations. Try out time-limited presentation formats such as Ignite or Pecha Kucha.

• Incorporate pre- and postconference virtual options to immerse your attendees in networking and content before, during and after your event. This will build excitement and broaden communications.

• Develop a range of experiences that are tailored to each of the four primary personality types: blueprint (those who value processes), action (those who value opportunities), nurturer (those who value teamwork) and knowledge (those who value logic and research). Ensure that your meeting includes content that appeals to all types and integrates both left- and right-brain tasks.

**Facilitate Collaboration**

• Unleash the power of your suppliers by offering a variety of sponsorships, relationship-building opportunities, events, and technologies that facilitate and encourage interactions with attendees.

• Personalize the meeting by scheduling plenty of networking opportunities. Improve the attendee experience by creating spaces and times for them to mingle.

• Include corporate social responsibility opportunities in your agenda. Allow attendees to engage with each other and organizers while contributing to the local community.

**Ease Education**

• Unlock your attendees' abilities to absorb new concepts by using all three learning styles throughout your meeting: visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Let your attendees see, hear and experience your meeting.

• Design practical takeaway materials that attendees will want to keep and refer to after the meeting.

**Ensure future success**

• Identify key performance indicators of success, and measure the quantitative and qualitative return on investment and objectives. Ask attendees if they value the meeting, and make changes based on their feedback.

• Benchmark with other meetings and conferences. Use results-driven metrics that will be measured year-over-year.
• Consider incentives to build excitement and loyalty among attendees and suppliers to keep them coming back. Treat every attendee and supplier with respect to build long-term relationships.