

METHODOLOGY FOR DEFINITION, STRUCTURE & MANAGEMENT OF CONFERENCE CONTENT AND SPEAKER SELECTION

The rise of the conference industry over the last 15 -20 years is one of the remarkable phenomena of the new industrial scene at the beginning of the twenty first century. Staging of all types of conferences, whether company internal, customer marketing or professional/industry-led events has increased markedly in our new knowledge society.

There are several reasons which have coincided to drive this change:

1. The knowledge base of industry has increased enormously with the doubling of knowledge now occurring roughly every year. The service industries are now a much larger part of the industrial base and these industries in particular rely on manipulation of knowledge and information. There is thus an increased need to communicate this knowledge by meetings in addition to publications and particularly to create a conference forum where participants can effect multiple new introductions in a contracted period of time and interact with other participants.
2. Particularly during recession, companies need to hold down marketing expense and to replace one to one sales calls by other techniques of mass communication. Additionally many major companies, who downsized during the recession of the early 90's, then built up resource to work on core issues and no longer deployed their previous sizeable support functions for activities such as conference provision. This has recently been exacerbated by the slowdown of the early part of the new century. There has thus been an increase in outsourcing and a need for external skills and support.

Marketing Consultancy Services (MCS) has been employed as an external provider of conference skills. The following methodology has been developed within MCS for the management of conferences. It has been used in the creation of some 50 conferences for IBM Marketing and for other clients and independent conference organisers by MCS practitioners from 1985 to 2002. It is equally usable for small or large events and for one-off conferences or travelling shows. (In the latter case the speaker set has to contain relay teams to relieve each other through time.)

1. Consult to set the OBJECTIVES of the Conference and initial TARGET AUDIENCE
2. Decide the main THEME (and sub-themes) for the show
3. Decide target CONTENT and logical STRUCTURE or SEQUENCE, using existing industry knowledge and via discussion with conference originator staff
4. Decide how much is MAIN TENT and how much is ELECTIVES based on "fit to main strategy of the conference" or "fit to sub-themes"
5. Work with conference originator staff and give own input to establish TARGET SPEAKER LIST - maybe 3 times greater than number of speakers required depending inversely on leadtime between project commencement and conference date
6. Decide SPEAKER MIX i.e. originator's internal personnel, customer speakers, recognised experts from the industry, academics. This can include some high profile individuals to act as the "main draw" of the event

7. Write CALL FOR PAPERS which becomes basis of text for brochure
8. Write draft conference BROCHURE
9. CONTACT speakers and establish availability, willingness, desirability
10. VISIT selected speakers to help prepare presentation and give rules on timetable for preparation and timing for the event itself, media for submission, agree fees where necessary, hand out briefing sheets etc.

Where the speaker is a customer of the conference originator the visit is done with the salesman to try to develop other sales objectives within the meeting. Preparation for the conference can present good sales opportunities with the customer speakers themselves

11. Finalise Conference Brochure with full speaker information
12. Advise on INTERPRETER selection if required
13. Write SPEAKER BRIEFING PAPER which aims to show each speaker why they have been selected, and how their subject and presentation relates to those of other speakers and to the overall THEME. This allows them to cross-refer to other parts of the conference
14. Write CHAIRMEN BRIEFING to show what are their roles (assuming there are more than one for main tent and elective streams).
15. Manage submission and correction of presentations for reproduction as DELEGATE PACK.
16. Produce final speaker timetable (main tent and electives)
17. Plan schedule of offline meetings between attendees and speakers where this is required (possibly attendee to attendee forum also)
18. The designer of conference content develops such familiarity with the substance of the conference that (s)he can often act well as chairman for the event. However it is clear that often an operating executive or public celebrity is selected as chairman for reasons of credibility or prominence in front of the attendees/audience
19. Hold INTERPRETER BRIEFING meeting and give INTERPRETER BRIEFING PACK with industry-specific material to allow preparation for effective interpretation
20. Manage speakers during execution of conference. Handle emergencies by having standby/RESERVE speakers.
21. Produce EVALUATION SHEETS.
22. Complete end of show EVALUATION.
23. Set up other POST EVENT VALUE CREATION e.g. telephone sales campaign, book/video/webcast of the show, service those unable to attend, seek attendees willing to speak next year etc..