

WHY ALL B-TO-B EVENTS ARE INFLUENCER EVENTS

What's driving the changing b-to-b landscape, and how to transform internal and external events into story-driven engagement platforms for the people who matter most

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THE ERA OF THE B-TO-B INFLUENCER EVENT HAS ARRIVED

What was once a ballroom setting is now a loft in Brooklyn. What was once a stage and slide presentation is now an interactive gallery. And what was once your “press event” or “internal event” or “investor event” is now, simply put, your influencer event—and quite possibly a combination of them all.

Thanks to massive changes brought on by social and digital media, and the power of the attendee to influence everything from reach to sentiment to sales, marketers are no longer looking at b-to-b events as didactic experiences buttoned up by specific categories of audiences. Instead, marketers are acknowledging that all attendees are influencers, and that b-to-b events need to be designed to give attendees opportunities to be amplifiers at every turn.

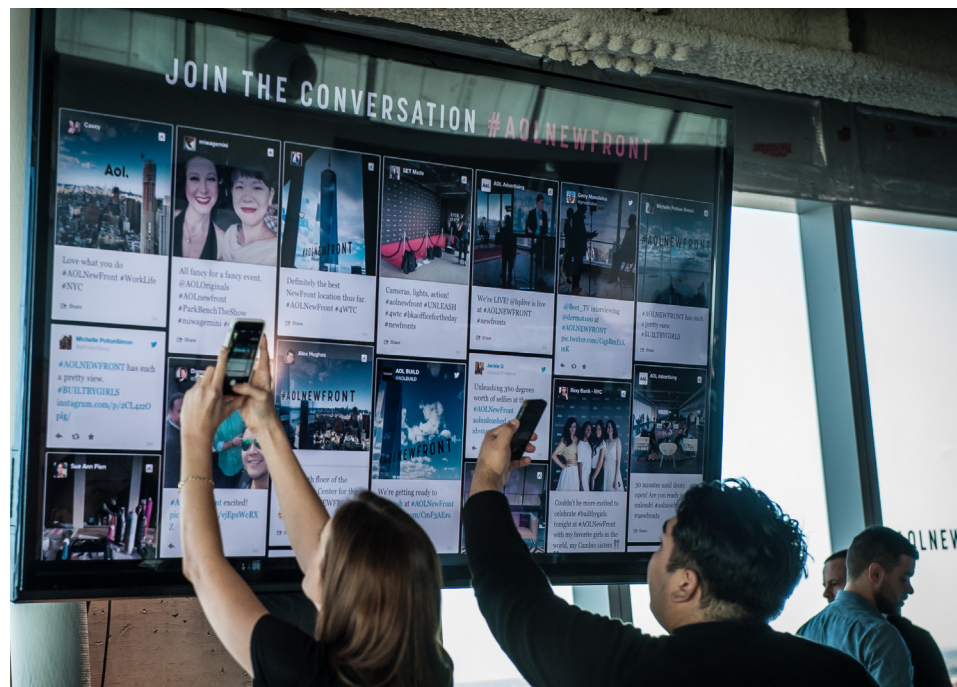
“Attendees take in content as a consumer and put it back out from their own unique lens, and when they walk into a b-to-b event, while it may be in their business life, they’re approaching that information from a b-to-c perspective,” says Jennifer Kauf, VP of Strategy at Barkley Kalpak Agency. “We’ve had to shift how we approach the attendee experience and put trust in that audience, and take advantage of the fact that they are going to be conveying the message on behalf of a brand.”

Attendees are being looked at from a holistic perspective, as a whole person who absorbs and shares information from the context of their own life, experiences and networks. Marketers are adopting an “attendee-first” attitude as a result, putting a stronger emphasis on the environment and the interactions of and between attendees. The presentation of content is more about what’s on the ground and less about what’s on the stage.

Smart b-to-b events include strategies that help legitimize the voices of attendees and earn the brand’s validation from these influencers. It means marketers are loosening the reins a bit in controlling the outflow of content, and also working harder to make sure the content and the

event’s messaging are clear and digestible. The key to navigating that loss of control is designing a content-delivery structure that weaves throughout the event and that tells a story.

“Building a b-to-b event today is about building a narrative,” says Andre Shahrदार, EVP of Strategy and Development at Barkley Kalpak Agency. “We’ve seen the demise of PowerPoint. The result is that marketers need to deliver attendees a story, and these nuances are going to force businesses to refine what they’re saying and focus back on the message.”



And the message for event marketers is clear—interactions and experiences drive influence. And so does a good story.

Read on as we take a closer look at today’s b-to-b influencer-attendee, the types that matter the most, how you can reach them through compelling, authentic storytelling and ultimately, how you can get your event out of the PowerPoint rut and into the modern and changing attendee experience.

THE FIVE TYPES OF B-TO-B INFLUENCERS THAT MATTER MOST

Event marketers traditionally identify an influencer by their outward reach—analyzing their offline impact on their social and professional circles, and their online behaviors including social media posts, reach and number of “followers.” But in the b-to-b setting, measuring influence is hard to define. You have to dig deeper and find experts in the field and the internal organization that can elevate your message in an organic, peer-to-peer style.

“It’s important to create, enviable experiences, which offer multiple shareable moments within an event. You can have one event where you’re offering an inclusive experience for every attendee, and you’re allowing them to all react to different points within the event,” says Shahrदार. “Collectively, it’s a strong effect.”

Here we look at five types of influencers, their characteristics, and what types of on-site experiences and technologies you can employ to make an impact across social, digital and traditional media.

1. THE MAVEN. This type of influencer is not always in a management position, or a senior leadership role, but is the person everybody goes to for reliable information about the business. It might be a trustworthy customer service rep with years of experience and de facto leader status. Or a product developer with friends in every department and an eye for where the business is going next.

“These are people that have always existed, but suddenly we’re recognizing they have power,” says Michael Reese, EVP of Creative at Barkley Kalpak Agency. “While you may have an internal organizational structure, people tend to go to the path of least resistance; they go to where they can get the information quickly and efficiently and often that doesn’t fall as well on a flow chart. It goes to these individuals.”

How to engage them: Give mavens roles they might not normally have—perhaps as a special presenter. Expand on the types of voices that are presenting the event message so that it’s not just the leadership doing a top-down communication; it’s faces attendees might interact with everyday having an active role in the structure and content of the meeting.

2. THE CUSTOMER. As social media is breaking down walls and customers get authentic information quickly, it only makes sense to invite customers into meetings and events and let their voices be heard. Customers offer enormous untapped potential of authentic, sentiment-driving influence.

How to engage them: Provide customers with your brand message and story beforehand. Host breakouts or peer-to-peer sessions; ask them to host a daily blog or a Q&A with an executive, rather than posting something from the communications team. Most importantly, let their presence be known and promoted.



3. THE INTERNAL ROCKSTAR. She’s the new salesperson who joined a large sales force and suddenly blew everyone out of the water, selling bigger and better than anybody else. And because of that, when she speaks people listen. People respect her and emulate her, down to her superstitious pre-cold-call routine.

How to engage them: This is your pre-event go-to person. Arm them with “executive” knowledge of the event that they can then bestow upon their peers casually. This can be a sneak-peek content packet, hashtag or collateral. Provide them with a storyline and watch as information spreads organically, by word of mouth.

4. THE MAKER. They’re not just a thought leader, they’re a doer; they’re not just consuming, they’re creating. This influencer emerged from the newly minted maker culture, a contemporary extension of DIY culture that is technology based. This is the influencer who is the experimenter, the 3D-printing adopter. It may be your designer, your product developer, your engineer, or maybe even your Head of IT.

How to engage them: This trend is about being social, so develop hands-on workshops and classes led by makers to promote shared experiences among attendees. Today’s attendees love getting access to the people who “make the stuff,” so bring them out from behind the scenes and let them show their stuff.

5. THE NAYSAYER. Out of all influencer types, this type is the double-edged sword but powerful nonetheless. They’re the attendee that will voice concerns about the food over Twitter. They’ll post about a presenter they didn’t like so much. Remember: All influencers have the ability to be this type if they’re not pleased with something.

How to engage them: Two words: Response time. Make sure your social media is manned, honest and transparent. Immediately acknowledge that you hear them. “If you do this, it only speaks well for your brand, that brand attribute immediately comes out—that you’re empathetic, you listen and are responsive,” says Adam Suellentrop, VP Production & Client Services.

HOW TO TURN YOUR EVENT INTO A STORY-DRIVEN ENGAGEMENT PLATFORM

You know how the b-to-b landscape has changed, you know what types of b-to-b influencers are out there. Now, how do you make sure the content you're serving up is shareable and consistent? It starts with a story, one that will generate a ripple effect across your brand's circles of influence. Building a storyline first will help guide you as you develop all of your touch points.



Step 1. Start backwards, and identify the final chapter, the ultimate message of the event. And then, work your way forward.

"You have to first identify that kernel of importance, that defining message you can come back to throughout the planning stage and ask yourself, 'Does this support the message? Is this helping to amplify or communicate this in an evocative way?' And, 'Is it authentic to the core company message?'" says Shahrddar. "Approaching the event from this perspective, puts you naturally in the shoes of the attendees, who will evaluate and ultimately know they're making the right choice to then amplify your message."

For the launch of its new OLED 4K TV, LG's ultimate goal was to sell product. In a crowded electronics space burdened by "spec" talk and acronyms, the brand wanted to go beyond the traditional event where the TV comes out, the executive outlines the capabilities and photos are taken. BKA partnered with HS Ad USA and LG to create a new "final chapter" that transformed the typical technical conversation into a more artistic narrative that multiple influencer types could grab onto.

Step 2. Decide on a delivery mechanism. In the case of LG, it was supporting students and schools via art.

LG leveraged art as a device to tell a story about the product, and the LG Art of the Pixel competition was born, a new media art competition among top U.S. art schools where the TV served as the canvas—and the TV specs played a role in how the student artists' work was inspired. Ultimately, winners would receive special grants, while LG would be able to drive home the revolutionary nature of this TV technology.

A black-tie awards gala was held to announce the winners at the massive Gotham Hall in midtown Manhattan. Complete with a red carpet entrance, the event attracted celebrities, LG customers and executives, students and the press.

Step 3. Create an event based on that device that offers various on-message touch points that build on each other and stimulate an emotional response.

The Art of the Pixel Gala included an arc of experiences—cocktail hour, three-course dinner, presentation of awards and a performance by U.K. singing sensation Sam Smith. That flow of the event meant different opportunities for the different types of influencers on the ground to absorb and share content or experiences that resonated with them and their goals. Multiple focal points dotted the evening: on each side of the ballroom, 400-foot custom-built galleries featured the artwork of the nine student finalists on LG TVs—with LG G4 phones doubling as placards; famous works of art, coupled with quotes from student finalists and the campaign logo, were projected onto the venue walls throughout the evening.

"We were celebrating the students' art in a big way and comparing them to the great artists of the past, and also, instead of us telling the specs for the TVs, it was about using their voices to tell how that tool, the TV, helped them create something that couldn't be done before," Suellentrop says.

Step 4. The ultimate lesson: Don't box yourself in with "typecast" b-to-b events. Combine influencer types for a collectively stronger outcome.

Ultimately, stories are about relationships. And at Art of the Pixel, opportunities were created for real relationships to happen between all of the different types of attendees—including celebrities Neil Patrick Harris, Sarah Jessica Parker, Sandra Lee and Kevin Spacey. Students, celebs and the media mixed and mingled in the same section for dinner. There were no red ropes.

B-TO-B INFLUENCER EVENT SUCCESS STORIES

AOL NEWFRONT 2015

For the NewFronts in April, AOL wanted to support its overall video strategy for the year, which was a big leap going from 80 pieces of unique content to more than 3,600 pieces of unique content—an effort it's calling Content 365. The narrative and brand message: AOL "Unleash."



While most NewFronts take place in the same venues year after year, AOL wanted to stake its claim somewhere exciting—at 4 World Trade Center. This space, newly opened, offered a sense of power with 360-degree views of Manhattan, which tied into that 365-days of content theme AOL wanted to promote. It was also strategic, in that the entire room became a curated photo op.

For presentations, AOL deployed a 100-foot LED screen with big bold visuals of content for every speaker. It made a statement, but it was also shareable from a smartphone, so influencers could easily share big, beautiful "posters" of content from the event.

BJA designed a custom DJ booth where a mapped projection of AOL content appeared behind a cut out of the AOL logo. To highlight the Content 365 strategy, a 40-foot wide custom designed and built iPad wall featured 365 iPads, streaming continuous AOL original content throughout the event. AOL brought the HuffPost Live set to the NewFront, conducting live interviews with their talent and clients, all while creating even more shareable content that influencers could spread across social media networks, in real time.

MASTERCARD SALES LEADERSHIP MEETING

MasterCard's annual sales meeting gathered top leaders from around the globe in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to share case studies and best practices. These are employees with direct relationships with customers.

From dynamic registration to a custom app, MasterCard wanted attendees to share photos, ideas, ratings and feedback. It all took place in an enclosed space so attendees



could talk freely about proprietary information in a safe, secure but social manner. Typically, these attendees would get messaging from top executives. Instead MasterCard curated content that was presented in small bites, and the presenters were a robust cross-section of attendees.

But the secret sauce to this event -- inspirational experiences.

"The purpose of bringing people together in different locales is to tap into the power of environmental change. People remember what they feel about a place, so we spent more time meeting outside of the confines of the ballroom," says Kauf. "There was an interactive space for learning about new products, there was a ranch in Argentina. MasterCard wanted to create priceless experiences in some of the most inspiring spaces around the city, all leaving lasting impressions on attendees."



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ABOUT BARKLEY KALPAK AGENCY

Barkley Kalpak Agency is an award-winning creative agency focused on providing event strategy, design, planning, and production. For 25 years, they've been collaborating with well-known brands to create industry-recognized experiential events all over the globe including: press events, product launches, upfronts, business meetings, conferences, galas and award shows.