

ACHIEVING MORE

THE EVENT MARKETER'S GUIDE TO NEXT-GENERATION LEADERSHIP MEETINGS

21 Ways to Engage, Excite, and Resonate with Today's Internal Teams

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For as long as companies have been bringing their executives and employees together to set a course for the year ahead, the leadership meeting has looked pretty much the same. Teams fly in from around the world, grab a seat and listen in as executives deliver the state of the organization for the next 12 months. After one or two days of presentations, and a couple of obligatory networking events, badabing badaboom—everyone flies home and (presumably) carries out the orders delivered at the event. Ah, the “glory days.”

Problem is, businesses worldwide are operating in an era of uncharted change. At a macro-economic level, there has been a move away from the regional leadership structure that was once the standard for most multi-national companies. Now, rather than one regional leader overseeing everything, you're more likely to see multiple leaders across the company's various functions—leaders of sales, leaders of manufacturing, leaders of marketing—spread throughout the org chart and the company's global footprint. (In other words, that one guy who needed to know everything for the leadership meeting? Yeah, he no longer really exists.) The result is a global community that's trying to function like a national one, but that is struggling to streamline their unique mashups of cultures, languages and people.

Your employees are changing, too. Peer influence today carries more weight in personal and professional contexts than at any other time in history. That means that your company's message is much more likely to be embraced if two things are true: your company's managers are, in fact, friends (and therefore peers) with one another; and they are part of setting the company's course, rather than being the mere receptacle for the message.

Add to that the simple fact that technologies like video conferencing and webcasts can accomplish what used to require a plane ticket and a hotel room and the very idea of the modern-day leadership meeting has to change and refocus on what it can do in light of these paradigm shifts. Luckily, it has.

“We're starting to see a shift among leadership meetings to be more centered on culture and working together and less on ‘Here's what we need to do this year, guys,’” says Rich Sturchio, President at leading brand experience agency, Cramer. “The need now is for companies to start to focus on things they can't do by other means—those things that require personal time together.”

So what does a next generation leadership meeting look like? In a word: Small. Not small in size, although that is certainly trending, but small as in more intimate and more focused on building personal relationships among employees from around the world.

“Getting culture back into a global company is a part of what the good companies are doing now,” says Sturchio. “It really goes back to the way traditional business was done—through personal relationships. That gap in multinational companies was missing.”

Great leadership meetings today are flipping the old model upside down and putting the “networking” element at the forefront as a means of fostering genuine peer-to-peer relationships. They are also cutting back on the top-down lectures by top execs and instead bringing in participants to the stage as the company's storytellers. And that sit-down, hours-long slide show of the past? It's going away, too, as event marketers are testing out shorter pieces of content, flexible schedules and environments that keep attendees up and on the move.

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Bottom line, the leadership meeting as we know it is a formula that may have worked a decade ago, but in today's economy, isn't helping companies hit the mark when it comes to generating the kinds of real results the meetings are designed for. In this white paper, the leadership meeting experts at Cramer take you inside their next gen playbook for an in-depth view of the four key areas that can make the biggest impact on your leadership meetings. Ready to get started? Read on.

FLAIR FOR THE DRAMATIC

Five ways to leverage the principles of theater design to create incredible leadership meetings



Every successful next gen leadership meeting has one thing in common: a great story. Far from a succession of disjointed and, let's be honest, frequently boring slide decks, the new school of leadership meetings requires a much more theatrical approach to keep attendees engaged and excited. Here are five ways to utilize the principles of smart theater design to bring your company's narrative to life.

Theater Principle #1: Set the Tone

The minute your attendees walk in the room, you are setting the tone for the entire event. So ask yourself a few key questions about what you want to convey, and if it supports the meeting's overarching purpose and story. Leadership meeting audiences are typically comprised of stakeholders within the company, so impressing customers is not a top priority like it might be at a sales meeting. Think of the experience as an extension of a corporate boardroom, "more architectural rather than showy—minimal and austere but elegant, not flamboyant," says Doug Randall, Creative Director, Environmental Design at Cramer. "It sets the tone that its serious business."

Theater Principle #2: Set the Expectations

Anyone who has ever seen an off-broadway show or experienced a play in the round knows that feeling of being a part of the show. This is a feeling you want to recreate at your leadership meeting in the way you arrange your seating. "We always push for group seating so that you can facilitate collaborative moments," says Randall. Round tables, for instance, send a message that there is an expectation that attendees will interact.

Theater Principle #3: Set the Stage

Theater in the round can be a scary proposition for many executives, especially those not accustomed to being on stage, so Randall recommends a three-quarter round stage (it features a long thrust into the middle of the room so presenter can walk into center and then retreat to main stage back to the wall), or, skipping the stage all together so the speaker can mingle through the space while speaking. "You don't want that person talking down from on high—you want a feeling of collaboration," Randall says.

Even entrances and exits can send a message that either adds to the story or detracts from it. A speaker who comes up from the audience versus backstage, for example, sends a message that he or she is one of the team. "Those nuances of how you enter the stage can set up the expectations for what that presenter is saying or how you want to convey their importance to the group," says Randall.

Theater Principle #4: Set up the Story

Every great story has an emotional tug, be it joy, sorrow or excitement. And just because it's a business event doesn't mean those human elements should be left out. In fact, quite the contrary, genuine, moving stories (and a good sense of humor) can help foster trust between employees and executives. So whether you go with an opening video or a keynote to kick off the event, be sure to look for the emotional thread. "If there's no OMG moment then it's not a story worth telling," says Randall. "Like any great theater, that opening scene sets the tale, sets up all the possible conflicts and crises so you're primed and ready to wonder what happens to the storyline."

Theater Principle #5: Set the Room

Transforming your leadership meeting's venue from a one-time, sit-down experience into a multi-purpose environment not only saves money (you're already paying for the A/V in the room, after all), it enhances the attendee's overall experience. One way to do it: set up a trade show-style "festival" around the perimeter of the room manned by subject experts so that attendees can take a break from the sessions to learn something new, and then come back and discuss in small groups. "Get people up and moving so they're not sitting the whole time," suggests Randall. "And try to keep it all in one room. It's more dynamic, more efficient and more interesting—and you get more for your event dollar."

ANATOMY OF A GREAT SESSION

Four 'TED-centric' tips to help turn your general sessions into powerful moments worth remembering

You don't have to be in the event marketing business to appreciate the impact TED Talks have had on the world. "Conferences in general have had to raise their game in the last few years because attendees are like any consumer—they're judging their experience against other experiences they have in the world," says Angel Micarelli, Creative Director, VP of Content at Cramer. "Events are more interactive, they're more entertaining, they're more enriching so their expectations of what will happen when they see someone up on the stage have grown and the industry has to keep up with it."

Indeed, from their concise 18-minute time limit to their compelling stories, TED has become the gold standard for all business presentations. Here, a four-point breakdown of how you can embrace the magic of TED Talks at your next leadership event.

TED Tip #1: Craft a Compelling Story

If you dissect most TED Talks, you will find a clear narrative arc, and this is what you want for your leadership sessions, too. "Some landscape, a conflict, what the consequences are, what changed and what followed," says Micarelli. Start by asking your presenters to look at their presentation in a storytelling way: What do you want the audience to feel? What do you want them to take away? What will inspire them, what will intrigue them? "When you start from that place, then it changes right from the beginning the way they're approaching the presentation," Micarelli says. "It's not what's going on in the PowerPoint, it's what's going on quite literally in the hearts and minds of your audience."

TED Tip #2. Don't be Afraid to Get Personal

It's a strategy some executives might not be accustomed to or even comfortable with, but in the new era of leadership meetings, it's an imperative. "We encourage presenters to bring personal stories, their own style to the stage," says Micarelli. "We help them be the best version of themselves, but we don't try to make them someone they're not." A little vulnerability and a good sense of humor can go a



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CREATIVE DIRECTOR, VP OF CONTENT

long way towards making a genuine connection with the audience.

TED Tip #3: Keep it Short and Sweet

Only the most accomplished professional speakers can hold a room for 45 minutes or more, and most companies don't have them on the payroll. A good rule of thumb for leadership meetings? Sessions should be no more than 30 minutes long without some kind of dramatic break (like a change in presenters or a video). Keep the energy up *during* the presentation with sound, music, supporting video content and visual support.

TED Tip #4: Make Sure it's Well-Rehearsed

There's no winging it in the world of TED. In fact, most TED presenters practice for six months before they ever take the stage. Six months! "You don't have to memorize the presentation, but you do have to do it so many times that you feel completely comfortable with it and it's *internalized*—a word we use very often," says Micarelli. Letting your execs know that TED Talks take six months to prep also gives them permission to not be perfect right off the bat when they get on stage. "It gives us some leverage to say, 'You really need to practice if you want that type of performance,'" Micarelli adds.

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY

How to master the art of social media—and corporate privacy—at leadership meetings

Most marketers would agree that social media is an asset to any event portfolio. But for event marketers charged with handling internal meetings and events, social media can be a high-risk proposition. With confidentiality and attendee privacy top of mind, here are seven strategies for leveraging social media at leadership meetings and events...and keeping it private.

1. Pick the Right Platform

Many social media platforms offer privacy settings, but not all of them may have the features you want. “Selecting the right social platform all comes back to what you want to accomplish at your event,” says Ed Feather, Account Director at Cramer. “For leadership meetings, collaboration, discussion and sharing valuable content are typically key priorities,” (along with top-notch security features, of course).

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ED FEATHER ACCOUNT DIRECTOR



Private social media platforms come in three general flavors: off-the-shelf, public-private, and app-based. For example, platforms like IBM Connections, Jive, Yammer, and MightyBell are all off-the-shelf tools that can be set up as an internal, company-wide platforms employees can use internally and at events. Facebook Groups and, to an extent, the new Facebook@Work provide a public-private option that offers a private business variation within the larger network, but sits within a public universe. Desktop and mobile apps, especially event-oriented apps, often have the social component built in and in most cases can be customized to map back to your specific objectives for the event.

2. Give Them a Reason to Use it

Whatever platform you choose, you want to get people excited

about using it before they get to the event. If it’s an app, provide an incentive for downloading it before the show. Use it during registration and have staffers show attendees how it works. Offer a list of pre-event “to-dos” and exclusive bits of content to get attendees using the platform early. “You can create ways to spark some conversations and community discussion before they even get to the event,” says Feather.

3. Pre-Populate the Discussions

Within your social platform, set up groups, sub groups, topics or session-based discussions that give attendees an easy entry point for engagement. “It’s going to be more valuable to them and they know nobody’s going to be quoting them out in the larger world,” says Feather.

4. Engage with Influencers

Set up a group of people who are going to be discussion seeders, perhaps part of your marketing group who can figure out how to get the conversations going. Or engage some of your more social-savvy attendees to be guest contributors. “You want it to feel natural and help people see the opportunities for discussion, meeting each other and being part of the thought leadership,” Feather says.

5. Name Names

Hey, it’s a private meeting so no reason to keep the contacts off limits. Offering an attendee contact list enables attendees to set up meetings and make plans—which is the whole point of a next gen leadership meeting. “The social media use becomes more than just chatter, it’s got a purpose,” says Feather. “There’s more valuable conversation, more connection and engagement that happens.”

6. Drive Engagement During the Meeting

Bring your social platform to life at the meeting with interactive tie-ins like live polling during presentations. It shows attendees there is immediate value to using the platform, and gives event organizers and presenters real-time feedback on the value and impact of the content.

7. Before they Leave, Repeat

The social platform, and the content and connections that are shared upon it, should not get shelved once the event ends. To prevent this from happening, make sure that before your teams leave the meeting you have repeated the recommendations above. The attendees need to be given a reason to keep using the platform and should already see pre-populated content for post-meeting engagement. The influencers should be empowered with post-event activities and you should keep recognizing (naming names) of the people who are driving the most meaning, value, and outcomes as a result of your now thriving social-driven global internal-only community.

TOTAL RECALL

Five tips for boosting buy-in and retention of your key messages

Leadership meetings are unique animals in the event world. You can throw a flawlessly planned, beautifully designed, perfectly produced, technical marvel of an event but if the message gets lost in the delivery (too long, too boring, no story to connect with), or the attendees don't buy what the leadership is saying—you've still failed to meet the expectations of your business and leadership. Next gen leadership meetings acknowledge that peer influence is always more effective than top-down messages, and that there is actually greater value in getting most (not all) of your company's leaders on board with the vision ahead. Sturchio explains:

"Leaders don't understand that 100-percent agreement isn't going to happen," he says. "But if a peer explains to another peer why they support the plan, they can at least understand why people would support it and can't be 100-percent opposed to it. And that's the big win. It's not people running around saying 'Rah-rah,' it's the ones saying 'I understand and I can get on board with it even though I disagree.' Seventy percent buy-in with 20 percent saying I'm okay with it and only 10 percent fighting it—that's really good."

Here are five tips to boost buy-in and retention:

1. Think "Snapshots" not Spreadsheets

Set a few clear goals before you start planning (like, "make connections, work on culture and understand strategy"), and then make sure all of your content maps back to one of the three. And then, try to stay out of the weeds, especially when it comes to financial overviews. Think "snapshots" not spreadsheets. "Attendees can't retain 20 hours of meeting content thrown at them," says Sturchio. "Find out what you really want them to retain and make sure it's clear, focused and simple—don't clutter with too much."

2. Compete for Attention with Pacing and Delivery

Then, look at how you get to that information. "The pacing of the meeting is really important. It increases retention when people aren't bored," says Sturchio. Bottom line:

Ready?

Working closely with our friends at Event Marketer, we created this next gen playbook to give you an in-depth view into our approach for results-generating, impact-driving leadership meetings. The topics in this playbook from the executional-oriented elements like theater design, TED-centric presentations, and private social media, to the strategic concepts like boosting buy-in and retention of your key messages represent some of our latest thinking and approaches we have successfully utilized for a collection of the world's most respected brands.

Are you ready for your leadership meetings to achieve more for your brand? So are we.

Let's Go.

"Find out what you really want them to retain and make sure it's clear, focused and simple..."

RICH STURCHIO PRESIDENT



you're competing with email, devices and a thousand other distractions so keep the pace of your content moving so people will continue to be engaged. Also, be sure to change up the delivery with a mix of participant stories, videos, music, short breaks, and discussions.

3. Move Them Around

Many leadership meetings take place in some of the most beautiful places in the world yet attendees are kept inside. Moving people place to place increases engagement. Try giving your attendees a topic to discuss in a small group and then tell them to go outside and talk about it. "It's shocking how the level of engagement changes by being in a different environment outside with different people," says Sturchio. "It builds culture and gets the subject covered."

4. Add Some Shock and Surprise

Anything that's different is memorable, so don't be afraid to try something outside of your comfort zone. Like having attendees stand for a 20-minute general session. It might sound risky, but it will quickly become memorable (in a good way) when attendees turn to the person next to them to ask where the chairs are. And boom—they've just made a new friend. Mission accomplished.

5. Be Funny and Genuine

Every leader has a different goal and place they're trying to position themselves, but everyone wants to work with someone who is real. "Any time there's an opportunity to be genuine and funny, grab it because it is memorable," says Sturchio. "The days of 'My speech is going to be perfect. My slides are going to be perfect. Everything about me is going to be perfect,' are over. They don't invite that thing that is most important which is a connection to you."



Scott Connolly

Senior Vice President,
Business Solutions
sconnolly@cramer.com
781.278.2478