

ACHIEVING MORE

THE EVENT MARKETER'S GUIDE TO NEXT-GENERATION USER CONFERENCES

24 ways to break through in an increasingly competitive marketplace

If attending user conferences is an important part of your job description, it might feel like just picking the right shows to attend is a job in and of itself.

Welcome to the new era of user conferences—the increasingly cluttered space where event marketers are using every engagement trick in the book to create the conference that today's most in-demand attendees will flock to, year after year.

User conference attendees today are being pulled in more directions than ever before thanks to a combination of a strong economy, unprecedented growth across the technology sector, an influx of up-and-coming (and younger) customer bases and new cultural expectations that are driving b-to-b brands to refine and redefine their traditional events.

B-to-B brands are also getting savvier about how they use technology and the data it creates to laser target the types of attendees they need, and devise new and exciting events to attract them. The result is exponential growth in user conferences of all stripes, and an industry-wide imperative to change up the conference format that may have been effective a decade ago, but won't cut it in today's highly competitive landscape. How can event marketers stay ahead of the pack? And what's next when it comes to user conference strategy and engagement? In this white paper, the experts at Cramer take you inside their next-gen playbook for an in-depth overview of the five key areas that can make the biggest impact on your user events: engagement, theme, technology, community and a start-up spirit.

Ready to put your next user conference on the must-attend list? Read on.

FACT:

RAPID GROWTH IN MARKETING TECHNOLOGY = MORE USER CONFERENCES

With startups and large businesses continually introducing new technologies, your audiences are now users of more technologies, products, and vendors than ever before. In 2016, Scott Brinker published his popular annual marketing technology [supergraphic](#) representing all of the companies in the vertical. While focused solely on the marketing technology world, it is a microcosm of the changes across all technology verticals and now includes nearly 3,500 solutions, which represents 87% growth over the 2015 version. It's proof positive that it is a crowded landscape and one that's fueling an explosion of new user conferences. If you work in this landscape, it is now harder than ever to attract and retain users to your conference.

How can event marketers

stay ahead of the pack?

And what's next when it

comes to user conference

strategy and engagement?

INSIDE:

Four ways to engage attendees 'Beyond the Ballroom'	pg. 2
How to use a 'Message Map' to stick to your event's theme.....	pg. 3
Seven up-and-coming technologies —and what they mean to you	pg. 4
How to make your user conferences catalysts for thriving event communities	pg. 5
Bold and scrappy: What you can learn from start-up events	pg. 5

BEYOND THE BALLROOM

Four ways to engage user conference attendees in unique and unexpected ways

Today's typical user conferences are hardly typical at all. With top notch entertainment, vibrant creative scenes and surprise and delight experiences around every corner, what was once a simple sit-down business event has become something that looks more like a buzzing arts festival. Here are four tips for shaking up your user conference strategy to give it a more competitive edge.

1. Create 'Micro Experiences'

Successful user events are doing away with the "general session plus exhibit floor" model and are creating more unstructured physical spaces filled with immersive, tangible and tactile engagements—"experiences within an experience," says Brent Turner, SVP, Solutions at Cramer. "People are taking inspiration from and being influenced by the more general trend around consumer activations." TED 2016, for example, offered rock climbing walls and ball pits for its attendees. The C2 (Creativity and Commerce) conference in Montreal erected a full-scale Ferris wheel inside its event space. Bottom line: the same people who are coming to your show are comparing you to what they experienced at South by Southwest, Coachella and other festival-style events.

2. Become One with the Destination

Why host an event in a killer host city when you're just going to lock your attendees away in a nondescript ballroom? "The biggest and best conferences become microcosms entwined in their location," says Turner. "They're authentic and true to where they are." For example, think about how Austin, Texas, and South by Southwest have become synonymous with one another, and how you can bring that same sense of place and destination to your event. Some ideas: treat attendees to local musicians, artist engagements, and tasty fare by local chefs (even food trucks!) that infuse your user event with the local flavor—and a whole lot of energy.

3. Create a Next-Gen Environment

Smart environmental design is just step-one in the modern user conference experience. To truly differentiate your event, you have to give it a sense of special energy that goes

beyond the static identity work. "You're not just branding a space, you're figuring out how to take your business's purpose and keep that tied into all the spaces," says Turner. Can attendees collaborate on a digital graffiti wall that embodies your company's spirit of collaboration? Can a local artist create customized takeaways that align with your product's personalized features? "It's about how you keep what's special about your company's message going on outside the general session, so when you walk out there's something big and meaningful—a space of activation and activity versus passive signage illustrating just your brand identity," Turner says.

4. Be Courageous

"Give yourself permission to explore the edges of what's expected and possible—of stepping into the irreverent to find something that may not make a lot of sense on paper," says Turner. Like the G2 conference, which offered attendees the chance to climb above the show floor, circus style, and have meetings suspended in chairs. "You may amaze and engage your audience in a way they didn't see coming. That alchemy of physical reaction becomes so much bigger when you are tapping into those emotions in a way that's not expected or planned for." As an added bonus, quirky and unexpected moments are also highly shareable ones, and that viral effect is an imperative piece of any healthy user conference.

46% of b-to-b buyers are millennials, up from 27% in 2012. They're now the biggest generational group for b-to-b businesses.

GOOGLE/MILLWARD BROWN DIGITAL
B2B PATH TO PURCHASE STUDY, 2014

STICKING TO IT

How to use a 'Message Map' to create a consistent event theme

As every experienced event marketer knows, there are a million moving pieces with every event. It's often difficult, if not impossible, to take a moment at the outset to pause and think through how your event's multiple keynotes, breakouts, and other pieces of content will coalesce to support your show's overarching message. Indeed, the event theme can either be a triumph or a fail depending on how it's carried through the event.

"You need to be able to deliver on that theme," says Angel Micarelli, Creative Director, VP of Content at Cramer. "It's not just window dressing—it's the underpinning of everything you're doing."

Cramer helps its time-challenged clients develop and stick to a viable theme with what it calls a Message Map—a document that gives event marketers a blueprint against which every message in the show can be measured. Below is a snapshot of the Message Map's five important steps to creating—and sticking to—an event theme.

1. Get Your Stakeholders Invested

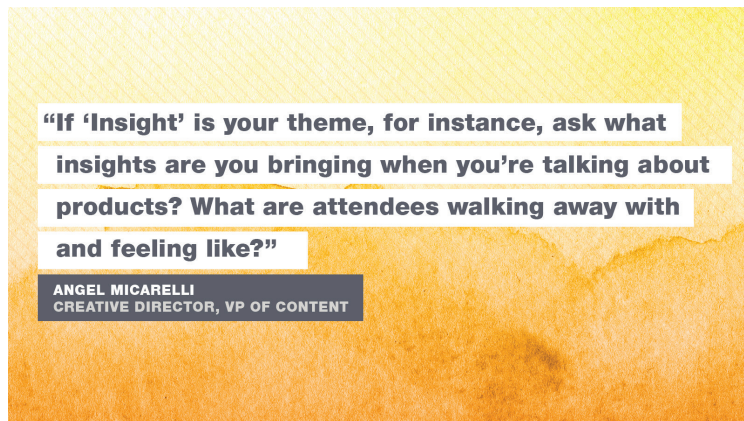
In order for your theme to be validated and carried through your event, you need buy-in and support from your key stakeholders. If you can get them to be part of creating the theme, terrific. If not, try to get them on board quickly and then be sure to keep them informed as the show evolves. "They are the standard bearers so you have to get them all invested and aligned," says Micarelli.

2. Give It Multiple Perspectives

In order to fully optimize your theme, you have to interpret it along multiple lines. For example, what will this theme mean to different attendee segments? What does it mean to different strategic lines, or product lines? "If 'Insight' is your theme, for instance, ask what insights are you bringing when you're talking about products?" suggests Micarelli. "What are attendees walking away with and feeling like? Did it pay off on the promise you made them that they would have insights?"

3. Make Sure It's All Connected

Look at each presentation as another piece of that articulation of the theme. How are you weaving that theme through? "It doesn't always have to be explicit,"



says Micarelli. The Message Map helps clients start from a macro view and then breaks down piece-by-piece into what the theme means among different audiences (executives, influencers, users), and what it means when each audience engages with the products. "The Message Map helps you drill down but keep the big picture in mind so you never lose sight of it," Micarelli says. "It guides you from a keynote in a general session all the way down to the breakout where you're going through the features and benefits, and keeps you focused on the big picture all the way through."

4. Carry It Through

User conference attendees engage across every physical and digital touchpoint so make sure your theme is clearly represented throughout all of your event communications (website, digital, signage, collateral) before, during, and after the event. The Message Map helps clients consider how attendees will engage with the theme and content "today, tomorrow and in the future" as a means to develop a compelling theme they can disseminate across every channel.

5. Develop a Set of Talking Points

As you plot out your presentations, develop a set of key talking points so you can clearly articulate the points you want to make about the theme and the content. "Building your talking points early on gives speakers a leg up because it very often forms the outline for their presentation," says Micarelli. "It also builds a pool of language for them to draw from so if they want to have a consistent way to talk about the theme, it gives them a place to start."

THE CUTTING EDGE

Seven up-and-coming event technologies—and how event marketers will use them

One of the calling cards of next generation user conferences is their innovative application of technology. From data collection to attendee engagement, here's a sneak peek at seven technologies about to break onto the scene.

1. 360-Degree Live-Streaming VR

Next VR is transforming virtual reality experiences from pre-recorded content into live experiences. The technology uses a 360-degree camera rig, captures live video (it can capture anything you want from the presidential debates to the Daytona 500), then stitches and encodes the content in real-time, immersing viewers in a live, 360-degree video experience.

Impact on Events: “Live and on-demand video is already very important to events,” says Greg Jones, Senior Associate, Strategy at Cramer. “By taking it and transforming it into a 360-degree video experience, you could take a VIP who couldn't make it to the event, send them a headset and place them ‘live’ in the front row to hear the keynote session as if they were there.” With the simple push of a button attendees could also jump from one breakout room to the next.

2. The Internet of Everything (IOE)

If your home thermostat talks to your phone, you're living in the IOE era. This term refers to the way smart technology is connecting itself to just about every device in our everyday lives.

Impact on Events: IOE in events means leveraging technologies across every device and live touchpoint to create highly personalized communications with attendees before, during and after a live event. “This is really going to transform the hospitality industry,” says Jones, adding that attendee preferences will eventually be pre-programmed into everything from the cab ride to the hotel (your favorite tunes on the radio) to your hotel room (a cozy 75 degrees, please).

3. Virtual Social Networking

Thanks to a company called Starship and its vTime product, people will be able to put on a VR headset, launch an app and socialize (as an avatar) in a virtual, social world, like Facebook or a virtual teleconference.

Impact on Events: Imagine a fireside chat by virtual fire pit. And unlike social media, VR social networking is anonymous.

“You'll get a lot more honest opinions in the chat room, message board sort of environment when there is a level of anonymity,” says Jones.

4. Voice Analytics Software

Cogito, from MIT's Media Lab, is an app that uses vocal cues including tone and speed of speaking to tell if a customer on the phone is happy, sad or irate. The app prompts the listener so they can address the customer's emotions in real-time, and tell the company what percentage of callers ended up happy.

Impact on Events: Speakers could use the technology to coach themselves, using their own speech patterns to craft the perfect keynote delivery. A separate monitor on stage could offer real-time feedback if they're nervous, or need to slow down.

5. 'Li-Fi'

Traditional wi-fi networks run on radio frequency. Li-fi uses LED light plus a microchip to emit light at such a high frequency that the human eye doesn't notice it. With li-fi, any light socket could potentially bolster your wi-fi network and transmit data up to 100-times faster than wi-fi.

Impact on Events: Let's face it, wi-fi networks at hotels do not meet expectations. A 'lit' li-fi room would mean a better signal, plus better load times for data intensive apps and interactives.

6. Directional Audio

Also from the MIT Media Lab, a company called Holosonics and its Audio Spotlight product does just what the name implies—tracks where you are in the room and then shines an audio spotlight of sound just to you.

Impact on Events: It's being used in retail, museum and digital signage environments now, but could be a powerful personalization tool for events, especially trade shows, where the show floors are typically loud and flooded with sound. “I can see it eventually connected to systems that track you as you walk through a space, determine if you're looking at a screen and then serving you audio,” Jones predicts.

7. Smart Luggage

MIT Sloan's Blue Smart is a 'Connected Carry-on' that features GPS location tracking, a digitally controlled lock that syncs with your phone, a built-in scale, proximity sensors that detect if you walk too far away (then automatically locks it) and a built-in battery charger.

Impact on Events: For event marketers on the road and in the air (which is pretty much all of them), this is a game changer. It could also make a killer VIP or hospitality perk for top targets at user events.

LOYAL, VOCAL TRIBES

How to transform your user conferences into catalysts for thriving communities

The brands with the most successful communities recognize that live events are the best catalyst for establishing and cultivating their communities, says Ed Feather, Account Director at Cramer. Below are four steps for turning your user conferences into catalysts for community.

1. Think Outside 'Support'

Most brands have an existing support community—one where their users can talk about product features and report bugs. These communities can help a brand drive satisfaction for their everyday user, but they rarely support the needs of a future-focused event marketer. “Your true advocates come to your event because they want to know where their industry and your brand is going next. By breaking away from your support community, your event-oriented communities can thrive and amplify their efforts across your broader industry,” says Feather.

2. Create a Spark

Even the most successful communities need a spark to get them going. “It is amazing how small, and sometimes even seemingly irrelevant the spark might be,” Feather says. For one of their global software client’s recent user conferences, Cramer got their community of users engaged in conversations around a cookie. Yep, a cookie. “That cookie has become a tradition for the conference attendees and by tapping into that small insight, we were able to rally their users in compelling ways,” says Feather.

3. Extend Your Theme

Your conference’s theme, which is typically aspirational and conceptual, can also provide the platform for continued content creation, conversation, and collaboration with a community. “It can be used to engage your community in post-event conversations, content generation, polls and quizzes, challenges, recognition, and more,” says Feather.

4. Be Purposeful and Exclusive

Create communities that are limited to the attendees of a particular brand conference or event. “These communities deliver additional content, networking, and, ultimately, value to their event attendees,” says Feather. “In turn, they provide event organizers with an always-on platform that supports their initiatives, including audience acquisition, calls for speakers, and lead generation. It’s a unique win-win for both event organizers and attendees.”

BOLD AND SCRAPPY

Four things established events can learn from startup events

1. Get Back to Your Roots

Startups are inherently close to their mission. They have a strong sense of clarity around their purpose that resonates throughout their events and with attendees. “As events get to their second, third, tenth year, they can lose sight of what their purpose is,” says Joe Lovett, Director, Strategic Planning at Cramer. “They try and make it more efficient when they should be taking a step back and trying to understand what they’re trying to do in first place.”

2. Never Stop Experimenting

Startup events are, by their very nature, starting from scratch, so they don’t have any expectations set around them (yet). The idea of starting from scratch is a scary proposition for most event marketers, but it may ultimately be the best way to keep your events relevant. “Don’t be afraid of change,” says Lovett. “Never stop fiddling and futzing. Throw it out and start over as if you’ve never done it. You might discover that your existing format is good but at least you’ve discovered, experimented and freshened it up.”

3. Show Your Users That You Listened

At startup user conferences, because every attendee is an early adopter, advocate, and stakeholder, startup companies listen to them and seek their ideas and feedback. They are also adept at responding to the feedback in overt and meaningful ways. As your events age and scale, never forget this key principle of user conferences: Listening and Doing are tied together. Make sure your user conference shows that your business actively does both for your users.

4. Spend Wisely

As conferences get more established, they get bigger budgets and often start spending them on big-name speakers and lavish parties. Resist the urge to blow the budget on flashy moments and instead prioritize networking, interaction, and opportunities for collaboration. Startups also tend to skip the exotic locales and keep their events in their own backyards. This enables them to boost that conversational value by having their employees and product developers on-site, talking to attendees and prospects. And isn’t that what’s events are really all about?

About Cramer

As a brand experience agency, Cramer is thriving in today’s new experiential era of marketing. The company’s fast growth has come as it has expanded its relationships with long-standing clients, while also landing a new roster of global brands, such as Caterpillar, GE, IBM, UPS, and Marriott. These clients trust Cramer to invent, craft, and fuel content-driven experiences, including meetings and events, activations, community and advocacy programs, mixed reality, and marketing campaigns. Visit cramer.com to see how Cramer achieves more with its clients.