event marketer® | **OPUS**

2020 STRAT CHATS

Candid conversations about evolving event strategies, trending topics and best practices for creating stronger experiences

Data Trends, Embracing Analytics and Pushing Event ROI in 2020

In this chat, we discuss changing trends, leveraging analytics and pushing the needle toward ROI with:

RENEE STRATULATE
Senior Marketing Manager-Technology, Data and Analytics

KERRI MASON
Former VP-Marketing

KATI QUIGLEY
Senior Marketing Director-Business Applications & Global Industry

RIC ROGERS
Director-SAP TechEd Strategy

MARY HEALY
VP-Strategy and Insights

As event marketers look ahead to the new year, many departments are already focused on bigger things, great experiences and better results.

Yes, the industry is changing in real time as marketers embrace stronger data, lean on analytics and charge ahead with new measurement blueprints for 2020. Yes, plans are already in the works for new strategies, revised ideas and revived experiences. And yes, our latest installment of Strat Chats—the national roundtable discussions produced by Event Marketer and leading global event agency Opus—assembled top brand marketers to discuss it all.

EM: As you look ahead to 2020 and beyond, what are you doing to strengthen your event portfolio?

KATI QUIGLEY: We have shifted toward thinking more about very specific audiences so we can make the most of our attendees' time and build strong communities across these audiences. We think about what is going to resonate with them and help them understand how to do their jobs better and transform their organizations.

So, as an example, it's identifying the business decision makers, and then breaking them down by line of business, and by industry. And doing the same for the developer and the IT side. And our partner community is so critical to us, and we want to help them connect with each other in order to find success for their companies and, ultimately, for our customers.

RIC ROGERS: SAP Marketing has a goal to become a top 10 brand. To do that, we really have to start speaking as a single brand to our audiences, by persona and job function, as opposed to by companies and products. So we're looking at all of what we are currently running and figuring out how to make it more about an outside-in view from the customer's perspective, as opposed to what we've been doing traditionally.

KERRI MASON: We're trying to diversify our brands as media brands and building them more into consumer-facing brands. The first line of that for us is definitely experiences. And the way we're starting to build out

around our tent poles is by thinking about cultural moments. For example, our team found a way to activate around Fashion Week with a message of inclusion — an alternative fashion show where people of all sizes, shapes and creeds are included. That's very authentic to the brand and it's a great place for us to be. It positions Teen Vogue to its audience in a different way. And there are sponsorship opportunities within. We're very mature as a media company, clearly. But as a consumer-facing brand, we're just starting to develop what that actually means.

EM: Mary, what are you seeing among your client base in this area?

MARY HEALY: Attendees go to events for a lot of the same reasons: to connect, to learn, to network. And we look at that experience as part of the attendee journey. Ideally, that's fed by information from the marketing personas, but we are seeing that a lot of companies don't quite have those connected yet. In some cases, that's a function of the marketing teams and the siloed nature in some companies, where they aren't all using the same resources. But for us to deliver the best experience, we're trying to use attendee personas.

EM: So, what are you looking at when you determine the attendee persona?

HEALY: It is really about what they do and how they feel during an event. Will they go to eight sessions in a day? Will they go to two? What is their frame of mind when they're starting? Are they nervous about networking? And

> "I think the marketing persona should feed the attendee persona, and then from there you have the physical behavior element versus media habits and the psychographics and all of the amazing pieces of information that are in a traditional marketing persona."
> **—MARY HEALY**

that's a real thing for people, especially b-to-b events. So it's about what you can do to help facilitate networking, when you know it's a main reason that people go, but it's not necessarily baked into a traditional marketing persona as a need or a pain point.

RENEE STRATULATE: I agree with you, Mary. Thinking about an attendee who is shy and would like a soft networking opportunity — that's definitely not something you're going to pick up with a marketing-wide persona definition. Do you feel there's space for both?

HEALY: I think the marketing persona should feed the attendee persona, and then from there you have the physical behavior element versus media habits and the psychographics and all of the amazing pieces of information that are in a traditional marketing persona.

STRATULATE: How are you gathering that data?

HEALY: From the registration, starting pre-event. And then during the event, with second scans and RFID, and all the rich information you can get from those. And then the post-event survey.

ROGERS: I'd be curious to see some of those event personas, because my sense is that we're all probably different event personas at the same event. There are times I don't want to engage and there are times I'm being interviewed by the press. Those are different personas.

QUIGLEY: As you accumulate more and more data around specific marketing personas, you start to understand what their habits are, what other things that they're looking for and how they move around the event. But you also give them choices. Because even someone who may typically do something one day might want to just sit and listen and not have to interact the next day.

So we look more at the accumulation of the data as opposed to very specifically one person saying, "Hey, I know this is what you want to do."

EM: Let's move on to measurement. It's one of the most important parts of gaining credibility for this profession. Technology has made it easier, but it's still often the toughest thing to do. So, what are you measuring and how are you measuring it? And how are you telling that story to senior management?

STRATULATE: When I first looked at Cisco's event business and I made inquiries about measurement, I was always handed verbatims — somebody telling us they had a very good time at an event. But we've come along a bit since then. We've moved from verbatims to descriptive statistics, where we could talk about the number of people who were attending or whether a person had been with you before. And then we got more sophisticated with more complex KPIs, like engagement points, or with bottom-of-funnel measures, which really speaks to the direct relationship between the event and its contribution to revenue.

Now, our focus is predominantly on our ability to predict, or predictive and prescriptive statistics. Everything I described before were lagging indicators — not particularly useful in decision-making. We'd like to be able to observe, "Hey, you look like someone who wants this or expects that," and, in the moment, make that offer.

But I have to know that somebody expressed a willingness to buy. And that I tagged that data element and sent it to sales. That means the event is not getting credit for the many hundreds of people that might go on to buy but didn't tell me about it during the event. Solving that requires unified operating models, unified data-tagging strategy and system integration, and we are years away from that.

As we've moved from that verbatim to something a little more tangible, it has emboldened the executives in events to go toe-to-toe with people who can show up with revenue numbers. So that's very exciting.

EM: How are you gathering the data you need to tell that story?

STRATULATE: We had about 200 tools in events at one time, and we consolidated all of that down into several key event management systems and universal tools. At the same time, the rest of the marketing organization was maturing around us, and they brought in tremendous core tech-stack capabilities. And we were able to integrate into that and leverage those multimillion-dollar investments.

QUIGLEY: It's the combination of two things: making sure the data can connect and that you have very clear calls to action from the event. Then you can follow the customer's journey beyond the event and see what actions they're taking and where they engage, and what's the next best action for them to increase their propensity for going through the funnel.

And at the events, it's not really about asking, "Do you like the food?" because the food's going to change and the city's going to change. It's asking, "What is your likelihood to buy Microsoft products? What's your likelihood to recommend?" And seeing what their next action is. It's the maturity of all of marketing that has aided in events being able to be more relevant in the marketing journey.

EM: Are you doing things at your events that help inform that? Like, tracking where people go, heat mapping? Are those tools part of the strategy?

ROGERS: It's not baked in. We do it at Sapphire Now because the budgets are bigger there. But most of our smaller events don't have the capability to do that kind of thing.

HEALY: Who's responsible in your organization for connecting the datasets? Is it the events team working with the marketing team so that the event data feeds into marketing?

QUIGLEY: It is. We have a centralized marketing operations function; they're the ones really driving the integration.

STRATULATE: We have a dedicated technology team within global events, as well as a very strong partnership with marketing IT. The events technology team aggregates the data and then works with marketing IT to automate the passing of select data to downstream systems. Data that passes between systems is determined by validated business-use cases.

ROGERS: We have an internal events measurement group. We gather tons of data for the field and marketing — net promoter scores and all of that. And that all goes to their side. But the team also does a lot of work just on the events side, and they can show us, literally, that a concert has impact in the satisfaction score of the event. Or that the food doesn't, but the keynote speaker does. That has helped us target our spends and our planning.

MASON: We have a data-targeting product that gives us a lot of data on how people consume content on our sites. And we're trying to merge that information with what we are starting to learn about our event attendees. Of course, our purposes are slightly different in that we're not driving it down a funnel — we're packaging and selling segments to advertisers or trying to sell tickets to our events — but it's the same idea.

We're now connecting the pipes to develop a more robust profile, and modeling on top of that, and adding additional layers.

EM: What have you learned from the attendees directly?

MASON: We did an extensive study at Teen Vogue Summit last year that was very useful. We learned that young women really wanted to see more active tracks. We thought, "Hey, if they're in the room with really big celebrities that would be enough." That was actually the least important thing to them, which was interesting.

They wanted high touch. They wanted to talk to female founders. They wanted practical next steps to getting their first job or launching their own business. They wanted more brand sponsors, which blew our minds. They said, "Why aren't there more here, so they could give me swag or give me an experience with their brand?" They really wanted that.

Now, we're trying to understand who these people are and how they're behaving on our platform and off our platform, and what that means for our advertisers and for us, selling tickets to next year's events.

ROGERS: You talked about people not caring about a celebrity, but wanting more sponsors. We've had the same results at a technical conference. So, people are people wherever they go.

EM: What are the platforms that you're using to manage data and data integration?

QUIGLEY: We're using a mix. Quite often it might be a technology partner that we have already, like Adobe or Marketo. Or we have our own tools. I sit in business applications, so we have some marketing tools there that are leveraged.

ROGERS: I work for an enterprise applications company, so SAP is what pretty much what everything is running on. The data gathering is registration companies and whatever else.

For us, it's more important to standardize the data gathering to make sure we're capturing the same formats everywhere we go. I just introduced a standard registration form for all of our events, so that when we're asking "Who are you?" in America, we're asking the same question in Europe.

MASON: We're pretty down and dirty. We build our ticketing on the Shopify platform. That's consumer facing. We also use some proprietary Condé Nast stuff, like I mentioned earlier.

STRATULATE: We use mostly third-party products. Where I'm a little more hesitant to use third party is in the whole machine learning space. I do not want to give the data away, or if I do give it away I want to make sure that it's packaged in such a way that the third party cannot train their algorithms to make business opportunities for themselves elsewhere. It removes my competitive edge immediately.

ROGERS: Renee, when you mentioned giving the data away, I had a small heart attack. Is GDPR affecting anyone's ability to measure? Because whoever we can sign up to capture their data, that data flow is being interrupted, and you can only keep it for 18 months. It has a massive impact.

STRATULATE: I'm sure every company is similar, but we will take all of our common data-use cases, which may involve a single application or a set of applications, and we will run it through an Infosec review and a privacy review for approval. And if there are any gaps, the vendor's required to mitigate those risks prior to us supplying a solution to the event team. So, yes, it has introduced a whole new cost and a whole new cycle of work.

With respect to what you can do with the data and how you target people, I think it's still undefined. I don't know that we know what's going to happen there.

HEALY: On the event side, are you anonymizing a lot of the data and still using the learnings based on the personas and basic information like first-time attendee versus long-time attendee?

ROGERS: Yes. And we're going to have to do that, long term. Because you're supposed to get rid of the contact information after 18 months. So there's only so much we can learn in that timeframe. If, over time, I can look at patterns at least, that would be helpful.

"

We've moved from verbatims to descriptive statistics, where we could talk about the number of people who were attending or whether a person had been with you before."
—RENEE STRATULATE

EM: How is the integration of digital into live impacting how you're gathering data around your events, or how you're amplifying the live component of your event?

ROGERS: For years, I've viewed digital as an extension of the live program. The live program is a specific moment in time and space. Digital is expansive and comprehensive. I can have an event that goes on 24/7/365 by using digital, so I embrace it fully.

EM: And if there's a digital extension of your live event, are you capturing the analytics around that and working it back in to telling the story about the live event?

ROGERS: The metrics continue to grow and they're always wonderful. But as the world gets more digital and the training gets more digital — for my event in particular — I'm now more of an extension of digital than digital is an extension of me. Literally, you can get the SAP TechEd content online and not come to the conference. You're coming more for that personal experience and access to the experts, because the actual content is already online.

EM: About a decade ago, Cisco's CEO said the days of flying 30,000 salespeople to one location for a three-day meeting were over; they were going to do it all digital. That's when all of the digital events had started happening. What's the balance today at Cisco?

STRATULATE: The pendulum has definitely swung back. Now, instead of being an either-or proposition, it's a merging of both. We consider the live program to have an opportunity for massive reach to a virtual audience.

The digital part is 365 days a year. You can curate content on the Cisco Live website and continue to motivate through campaigns that drive people there. Or you have social platforms where you're doing that. And you're essentially syndicating that content through all of these other, mostly online, spaces. So, the event perpetuates. And that produces data, which produces information, and that is critical.

Our metric set is now quite expansive because it's not about solely what's happening in the physical program; it's, "How optimized is my content through these other channels?" And it produces a whole new set of measures that we hadn't thought about before.

MASON: We're trying to figure out how to keep the specialness in the event for the ticketholders while also increasing the scale for our sponsors. That's a conversation with our event teams and with our editors, who are part of the creative team, to live stream or not to live stream. It is a monetizable opportunity for us, and

it's good for the brand overall. But if people are paying a ticket price to be in the room for something very special and very intimate, should we allow that to remain like that and maintain the value of that experience?

More often than not, we're going with the second choice because it is to our benefit to amplify what we're doing on the ground. It's part of how we pitch to sponsors. The New Yorker Festival generates almost 2 billion impressions, not to mention all of those digital impressions from the live stream and the video content that's consumed after the fact.

EM: Final question: If we're having this conversation again in 18 months or so, what will have changed? Where will we be in analytics measurement and proving performance?

HEALY: We're seeing brands across the board wrestling with relevance and trying to bring a consumer experience to a b-to-b audience, and trying to be there at the right moment. That's the challenge. If your goal is to sell a software certification or a training program, to be able to find that buyer in a moment out in the wild where they're not at a conference, how do you figure that out? So, I think we'll see more people getting creative with consumer and customer insights, the way that a brand strategist would have gone after it before, especially from the consumer side, and injecting that more into b-to-b experiences.

MASON: At Condé Nast, we have a foot in both worlds because as partners to these companies, we're trying to prove ROI for them through our events and through our media platform, so we're sophisticated in that regard. But on the consumer front, there are different KPIs, different measures. There's the gut and the creative foresight of our editors that is part of our value proposition as a company.

So, we're trying to bring those two things together in a way that makes sense for our business. We're also looking at what Generation Z is expecting of events, and playing that out across Teen Vogue Summit, New Yorker Festival, which is a little older but getting younger,

Pitchfork Music Festival, and seeing what those behaviors mean, and then how we can turn that into best practices or insights for our partners and ourselves.

ROGERS: Mostly what we've been talking about today is operational data. There are massive amounts of it and more coming in every day. And we're doing great things with it. But sentiment data is still kind of a nascent area. We can get real-time sentiment from aggregating tweets, heat-mapping and those kinds of things, and we can react to it in real time to ensure no customer is left behind.

As data continues to explode, there are going to be new ways to react to it. And we'll have more intelligent tools to be able to aggregate that data and look at things we're not even thinking of right now.

At SAP a few years ago, we created an entire event series because we saw that if someone brought five people of a particular job set to Sapphire, their propensity for buying was much higher. So we created an event specific to these job functions. Bring this guy, this guy and this guy, and we knew we were going to get a sale. Now, AI is going to lend so much power to that; it's going to change a lot of the things we do.

STRATULATE: For the next fiscal cycle, my primary focus is going to be machine learning — a subcategory under AI — much like Ric was describing. We're going to be doing a lot of investment in machine learning.

But what I'd love to see — and I assume that machine learning is going to help us do this — is to find, through some clever technologies, a group of people who have a need in a particular moment and construct an event for them instead of looking to an inventory or a body of events and saying, "I'm going to serve those people at this particular point in time with this particular content." I want to find an audience and construct an event to serve them in that moment. That's where I hope technology will take us.

ROGERS: Bringing events to the people instead of the other way around.

STRATULATE: That's exactly right.