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# Seven Successful Strategies to make your next Conference Job easier!

An Ideas Paper for -  
Professional Conference Organisers  
Meeting Planners  
Association Executives  
Conference Committees

by  
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In a recent survey of PCO and Meeting Planners, several key concerns kept emerging right across the board.

- How do we keep our Conference and Convention Sponsors happy?
- How do we boost delegate attendance?
- How do we generate Fresh Ideas for the program?

As a professional Corporate MC specialising in Multi Day Events, I get to work at a wide range of different Conferences and I see the different approaches PCO's & Meeting Planners take to tackling these 3 common challenges.

Interestingly, I've noticed that some PCO's and Association Executives are leveraging my skills to make their job much easier, where as others completely fail to even see that that opportunity exists.

So, I thought I'd share a number of case studies and ideas for each of these three common challenges which you might employ if you fall into the latter category.

## **How do we keep our Sponsors happy?**

Sponsors are a vital component of many conferences, paying significant amounts of money for a Display Booth, Naming Rights to a function/activity or perhaps covering the cost of a Guest Speaker. In return, they see their name in the program, on the holding slide of a PowerPoint show and perhaps their banners manage to get up on stage during a segment. It's little wonder that some Sponsors are hesitant to commit year after year or cry "poor" as their financial commitment invariably rises.

Here are two tactics that I always suggest as an MC to increase their perceived and actual ROI.

### **On Stage Interviews.**

Instead of just giving the Sponsor a brief 5 minute spot onstage to spruik their company or product, an Onstage Interview is a much more effective approach.

There are several advantages here that shouldn't be overlooked. A less outgoing Sponsor will feel more relaxed with the MC there with him and feel less nervous about being onstage. Important points that he wants to cover in his brief time will not be lost as the MC Interviewer will be working from a prepared set of questions or prompts. At the other end of the spectrum, the more outgoing Sponsor will not be able to "take over" and throw the whole program timing out if he goes on and on as they often do. The MC will be right up there with him to control the timing of the segment.

I suggest giving the Sponsor a brief guideline that outlines how effective these few minutes can be and how best to prepare the points he wants to cover. The MC can briefly meet and chat through the interaction before the moment. From past experience with this technique, they really appreciate your going the extra mile to help them get their message across.

### **On Stand Interviews.**

Several Events I have worked recently, we have conducted a series of On Stand Interviews. At the giant ESafe Expo at Rose Hill we did a 5 minute session with most of the display booths over the three days. This was filmed and shown up live on the Big Screen as it happened. Importantly, it shows off both the Sponsors people and their products and the recognition factor was high. The sight of the Cameraman also always creates a bit of buzz and excitement in the Sponsor Hall and people will sometimes gather around to watch it being filmed. For a lot of Sponsors this little segment is a big deal and many actually asked if they could get a hold of their own segments later.

But it doesn't have to be this high tech. At the recent VicParks Conference an interview was conducted at each Tea Break, highlighting the segment Sponsor and creating a bit of fun at the same time. A roving mike with the sound coming through the Display Hall areas is all you need.

(SideNote – Having this Sound set-up is usually a good idea for Conference timing anyway. MC's are always encouraging delegates to visit the Trade Displays in the breaks; the difficult part is getting them back to the plenary and breakout sessions after the breaks and keeping things on time. A Voice Over Announcement can work wonders here.)

Quite often as an MC we are acknowledging Sponsors by name in the Plenary sessions, but the Sponsors are outside following up paperwork etc from the breaks and don't realise that they are actually getting mentioned.

It doesn't take much effort to physically go around the Trade Stands highlighting the Special Offers, Prize Draws etc that are being run from each stand and the Sponsors feel they are getting the attention they deserve. The fact that the MC / Interviewer is right there at the stand also adds to Delegates understanding of where each stand is, which can be helpful if some booths are in separate locations as so often happens with larger events.

## **Boosting Attendance Numbers**

As with the Sponsors crying poor, Delegates are also now increasingly questioning the value they get out of events in terms of both time and money. They ask “What’s In It For Me?”

Web 2.0 strategies like Blogs, Podcasts and Video Blogs are increasingly being employed to spell out in succinct terms exactly what delegates will benefit from the whole event and more specifically, individual sessions.

A short message delivered via Video Clip or Podcast from the Conference Director is a great start, highlighting some of the features and benefits of the event.

More effective again is the different guest speakers highlighting the key learning points that delegates will gain by their attendance. This precisely answers the WIIFM question and will go a long way towards boosting numbers!

Recently I have been asked to assist in the production of these short segments, by interviewing the speakers either by phone, skype or live, and then editing the material down and helping making it accessible on the web. Past attendees can also be interviewed, highlighting what they got out of the event and how it has helped their business.

There are many different ways to do this with minimal costs. You will also find that many Speakers are now well set up to record their own short Video or Audio segments. Links to these “teasers” can then be either included in the Conference Info Packs / Website or forwarded directly to association members and potential delegates via email.

Free hosting sites such as Google Video and YouTube can also be used, especially if your event has open registration. Google increasingly loves Video and displays these clips in it’s search results. They stand out amongst the text results and do get a high click through rate. A person searching for specific information may well become a delegate if they see that your event provides the answers they are looking for.

Having the MC “project manage” this exercise also has many advantages. He or she gets involved earlier in the conference planning process, gaining an understanding the overall “big picture” and also builds rapport with the individual presenters which helps smooth the actual running of the event and in preparing linking material.

One point to watch out for obviously, is to make sure the Presenter does address the topic / learning points he promised! This is also something the MC or Program Director can double check diplomatically before the presentation.

## **Creating Fresh Ideas**

Repeat clients are Gold for any business and particularly for PCO's and Meeting Planners. But with it come the additional challenge of coming up with fresh ideas for each new event. Activities, Entertainers, Speakers, Venues, Themes, etc. This is an area your MC can also help with!

One disturbing trend I have noticed over the last year is that some events are booking their MC at the last minute, almost as an afterthought or perhaps waiting to see how delegate numbers stack up.

This however has been balanced by a number of clients who see the benefits of booking much earlier in the process.

Apart from the obvious of ensuring that their MC of choice is secured for the next event there are some other very valuable benefits.

MC's get to work in at a wide range of different events. At these events we get to see first hand the different Speakers, Activities and Entertainers. We experience the Venue and know how the Banquet & AV staff are to deal with. ( I recently worked with the most appalling AV Team I've experienced in over 25 years, at a top Victorian Venue. I'm advising my contacts to seriously consider bringing in their own team if they are considering the otherwise terrific facility.)

Why not start tapping into that knowledge? Once you have the MC onboard start using them as an integral part of the conference team. Here's a few ideas.

Ask them about Entertainers they've worked with recently who you may not have heard about. (At the recent IBNA/AustBrokers Conference, I worked with a singer who I believe was one of the best acts I have ever seen. The reaction was phenomenal. I had never heard of them before and perhaps you haven't either. Ask me if you'd like to find out who it is!)

Ask them for Speaker suggestions if you have a particular gap in the program. (I've been MC at the National Speakers Association Conference every year since 2003 and have worked with a huge range of Australian and visiting Speakers. I and other MC's I know, are happy to share that knowledge, but we usually wait till we are asked.)

Forward the Schedule or Run Sheet to them and ask if they can see difficulties. Your MC can advise on how much "buffer time" you should program into the schedule for housekeeping announcements.

Ask how others have handled the logistics such as; Lucky Door prizes, Speaker Giveaways, Questions from the floor during Panel Discussions etc. Why reinvent the wheel?

## **Idea Generation!**

Another approach that I have offered to some of my clients in the past is a short Facilitated Brainstorming Session aimed specifically at developing ideas for a Conference.

Part of the TeamBuilding and Professional Development services we offer is a Keynote & Workshop on Creative Thinking / Problem Solving and there are several exercises we commonly run that are perfect for Conference Idea Generation.

The way to get “great ideas” is to generate a “lot of ideas” and then evaluate their feasibility with your budget and aims. A facilitated session can really fast track this process.

This can be conducted at a Conference Planning meeting with the Committee, Staff and PCO present. If I am onboard with a Conference, especially a multi day event this session is a complementary addition. Talk to us about the details.

Note 1 – Some of the techniques we cover in the short session, you will be able to use yourself on other projects.

Note 2 – We also offer a free Brilliant Brainstorming guidebook that you can use yourself. Go to the Resource page at <http://www.timothyhyde.com> or give our office a call and we will send you a copy.

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## **In Summary**

Leverage the knowledge & skills your MC has by ...

- Contracting them earlier in the process
- Tapping into their experience and exposure to a wide range of events
- Interviewing the Sponsors either On Stage or at their Stands
- Conducting Pre Conference interviews with Presenters, Former Attendees and the Conference Director to help clarify in the Delegates mind, the “WIIFM”
- Help you generate ideas for an event by facilitating a Pre Conference Brainstorming session
- Download the Better Brainstorming guide.

## Background on TIMOTHY HYDE – Corporate MC

Let's face it, a good MC can be the difference between a successful and unsuccessful event.

You want your MC to be entertaining and funny.  
You need your MC to be professional and articulate.

That's why Timothy Hyde is the perfect fit for your next event or conference.

Timothy Hyde is one of Australia's most experienced and well-respected MCs. Having been MC for clients such as the Association of Financial Advisors, ANZ, Apple, Canon, Dairy Farmers, Queensland Public Libraries and many more, Timothy has an acute understanding of corporate expectations at any sized event.

Quite simply, Timothy has the experience and ability to keep your audience entertained and amused, whilst ensuring your program runs on time. This means you have one less thing to worry about when planning and conducting your event.

What sets Timothy apart?

- He's able to incorporate incredible magic effects into his performance.
- He keeps the audience interested and alert throughout the day with 'conference breakers' and team building exercises.
- He maintains a professional standard at all times, whilst still giving your audience lots of laughs.
- He provides total flexibility on how you'd like him to perform his role as MC.

So if you'd like to make your next event one to remember, visit

<http://www.timothyhyde.com>

or call (02) 4758 8961 to request an information kit.