



Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events (T.I.M.E.)

Topic: Building Bridges

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Written and Published by Sue Tinnish, 847.394.9857, stinnish@ameritech.net

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Welcome

What do bridges have to do with meetings?

No, this is not a riddle. The word "bridges" is used in music, chemistry, boating, computer programming and... (now)... meetings.

Meetings can serve as bridges to:

- Bridge groups of people.
- Bridge time.
- Bridge differences.
- Bridge changes in knowledge, attitude or actions.

This issue offers you some ideas to create bridges in your meetings - to better connect your participants, the issues, and the "call to action" - the reason for the meeting.

I am joined by Mitchell Beer from The Conference Publishers. Together we bridge our expertise to offer you insights on innovative meetings.

I invite you to contact Mitchell Beer at 613.594.5960 ext. 225 or mitchell@theconferencepublishers.com [Mitchell Beer](#) . Find more information on The Conference Publishers at their website www.theconferencepublishers.com or click here [The Conference Publishers](#).

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

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Who Needs Bridges

Participants attend conferences to build better results, gain new ideas and network with people in which they have much or even very little in common.

Conference organizers want to create an ongoing connection between the participants and their organization. Ideally, all types of meetings - corporate meetings, association meetings - maintain a degree of continuity between meetings.

The challenge: Face-to-face meeting offer limited time to create that bridge.

The solution: Find ways to bridge your message, the content and to create bridges between your participants.

In addition to the face-to-face component of a meeting, bridges can use the event as a springboard for...more....

- More connections between people
- More targeted content
- More reinforcement of key messages

This issue of T.I.M.E. offers you suggestions for bridge building that occur before, during and after the meeting and have high-tech and traditional looks.

Reducing Distance

Highway bridges are built to create a shorter route between two points. Likewise, bridges can help reduce the distance between your participants.

The benefits of "reducing the distance" are numerous - for the participants and for the organization. For the participants:

1. Development of professional relationships with colleagues
2. Increased knowledge sharing
3. More fun, satisfaction and greater learning
4. Creation of affinity for the organization linked to personal relationships - "I like being with these people."
5. Relationships that develop personal aspects

Organizational benefits include:

1. Increased loyalty and long term commitment
2. Increased membership and member contribution
3. Increased exposure as a trusted source of information

Bridges that Reduce Distance

What techniques can reduce the distance between people at your meeting? How can you create a community within your meeting?

1. Structured Introductions - Start sessions with an activity to quickly introduce people to others. While relationships cannot be forced, the potential for quality interactions is increased when people are encouraged to meet each other. Simple quick introduction can be used in which participants are asked to meet four other people (perhaps sitting on either side, to the back and front) in a total of 5 minutes. These bridge significantly increase participants' ability to network.
2. Best Practices Exchange - Allow people to share their own insights and serve as the subject matter experts. I have several examples of this format working marvelously. See the "Freebies" for more details.
3. Poster Learning - Traditionally, an alternative method to panels for disseminating and evaluating research. Poster sessions are a visual and concise method of presenting work. Typically, they are self-explanatory using photographs, charts, graphs, or illustrations to enhance a white paper or research. In addition, by allowing the author to stand next to the poster, poster learning also allows the conferees to engage in an informal and more in depth discussion of the topic. I like to use Poster Learning beyond the scope of simply presenting research.
4. Learning Lounge- I had the opportunity to experiment with this concept recently at an Annual Conference. The Learning Lounge provided a fun, relaxing place to meet fellow attendees, play with creative stuff (toys), and reflect on the conference. I had read about a Learning Lounge in a Convene article which you can find at:
http://www.pcma.org/resources/convene/archives/displayArticle.asp?ARTICLE_ID=5063 or click here [Convene Archives - Learning Lounge](#)
5. Social Networking Tools- I will be writing more about social networking tools in an upcoming T.I.M.E. Basically, social networking tools enable people to rendezvous, connect or collaborate through computer-assisted communication and to form communities.
6. Hear Themselves - Create opportunities for participants to speak whether through questions and answer times, interaction, applying new information, or even participating in more formal presentations.
7. Charitable teambuilding - This twist on teambuilding can offer participants a new way to connect and bond.
8. Receptions - Ahh, yes, this tried and true format can build community. But beyond suggesting that people hang out at the buffet and bar, you can actively promote community. Create a receiving line and bring your guests (especially those arriving alone) into the reception and introduce them to a group of people, form a roving greeter group who looks for people standing alone, or form areas where like minded people can assemble. Use ribbons or color-coded nametags to designate first time attendees.
9. Get speakers involved. Speakers are role models at meetings. Ask every speaker to endorse the value each participant brings and encourage people to meet each other.

10. Shared experiences- The simple experience will create commonality between large groups of people.
11. Create rituals- The emotional connection of participating on rituals cannot be beat for creating bonds. Insure that the ritual is itself meaningful to participants.

Pulling Together

A bridge also functions to connect, fasten, or put together two or more pieces. A document can command people's attention to focus on a complex issue. The document can "connect the dots" to complex issues and reinforce important meeting messages.

Documents as "bridges" can look like:

- Daily conference reports
- Newsletters
- Report
- On site summary reports
- Translation
- Reports following the meeting

Mitchell Beer is our expert this month on the subject of conference and meeting documents. The Conference Publishers is not limited to paper communication. In the next section, Mitchell covers the many looks to document "bridges" for meetings and conferences.

The Morning After

The Morning After: How Publications Bridge Events

by Mitchell Beer, President, The Conference Publishers, mitchell@theconferencepublishers.com

[Mitchell Beer](#)

How can a professionally-produced conference publication add impact to your next event?

The answer depends entirely on the goals and objectives that brought participants together in the first place.

Meetings can be held to make decisions, deliver educational content, or build motivation and momentum within an organization.

But here's an important common denominator: any event is a bridge between the issues and priorities that led into the meeting and the future that begins the morning after everyone goes home.

If the results participants achieve together are worth achieving, they're usually worth reporting -- whether the intended target for that information is the participants themselves, a relatively small group of in-house decision-makers, or an audience of tens or hundreds or thousands of stakeholders who never attended the meeting.

So the first step in designing a conference publication and aligning it with organizational objectives is not to ask how it will be produced or when it will appear. The most important question is why you

would want to produce it. The answer could lead you down several different paths:

- If a group of several thousand participants is about to spend several days in a meeting made up primarily of concurrent breakout sessions, a daily newsletter may be the perfect tool to build a sense of community and provide snapshots of the sessions that readers would have attended, if not for the equally compelling workshops they chose in the end.
- If several hundred participants onsite are the leading edge of a group of 10,000 or more members who rarely attend their association's annual meeting, an e-mail or web-based newsletter can help keep the offsite audience involved and engaged. In addition to promoting wider communication within the organization, the format may also help market next year's meeting, by giving readers an immediate snapshot (but no more than a snapshot) of the material they're missing onsite.
- If participants are expected to report results or decisions back to their own organizations, an onsite summary report will give them a common reference point.
- If the purpose of the meeting is to set out a common course of action within a company or an association, the discussion can be captured in a relatively detailed, as-it-was-said summary, or in a white paper that highlights key themes and priorities.

Organizations often try to document their meetings from presentation slides or flipchart notes, only to find that they've missed the details and nuances that bring onsite discussions to life. Or they'll wait weeks or months for an audio recording to be transcribed, edited, and summarized, then realize that the window of opportunity for action and follow-up has closed.

Without a conscious effort to capture the discussions that take place onsite, as they happen, organizers often find they've lost the element that will have the greatest lasting value for their clients...beginning the morning after everyone goes home.

Editorial Note by Sue: Meeting professionals have the opportunity to maximize the benefit of their meetings by thinking strategically about the need to capture information from the event. Realistically, they may need to focus their attention on details like venue, catering, and program development. However, meeting professionals should consider what "bridges" an event requires and they should add the right partners to their planning teams to accomplish that task. You can contact Mitchell to discuss those needs or this article at:

Mitchell Beer, CMM
President, The Conference Publishers
858 Bank Street, Suite 103
Ottawa, ON K1S 3W3
Toll-free: 800.265.3973 (Canada & US)
Direct: 613.594.5960 ext. 225
mitchell@theconferencepublishers.com [Mitchell Beer](#)
www.theconferencepublishers.com [The Conference Publishers](#)

More Bridges

Mitchell offered ideas for paper and electronic documents that function as bridges. In addition, consider

these electronic bridges to support your meeting before or after an event:

- Blogs or Weblogs - I wrote about Blogs in 2003 as a tool for meetings. Blogs have since popped up in the meeting industry (and just about every other place). Blogs are hosted web-pages that are more informal, usually opinionated, and quickly created. You can search for blogs on a myriad of topics. I recently used a Blog to supplement a training session I planned. You can email me about my experiences - see below.
- Podcasting - Audio files (mp3 format) can be downloaded into a computer or MP3 player for listening at a person's leisure. Podcasting is yet another electronic way to receive participant-requested information that can serve as a bridge to a meeting or event. I will be experimenting with podcasting later this year. Stay tuned...
- Audio archives - I received a great example of this technology at work from the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA). PCMA is making available to members selected sessions from their annual conference. I can listen to and view the presentation for sessions I am interested in.
- Wikis - Wiki (pronounced wee-kee usually said Wiki Wiki) is Hawaiian for "quick," "fast" or "to hasten". A wiki allows anyone to add or edit content to its pages. This editing is in sharp contrast to a web-page or single-users blogs. The ability for all users to edit content differentiates wiki and makes it truly collaborative. Wiki software is designed to be easy to use, requiring little training and no expertise in Web programming languages. Wikis are hot topics in the training world and will be appearing even more frequently in meetings. If you want to learn more wikis, an article appeared at the end of last year in The Meeting Professional. You can access the article at: <http://www.mpiweb.org/CMS/mpiwweb/mpicontent.aspx?id=2310> or click here: [Wikis](#)

Whether your bridge is virtual or paper, pre-, during or post-meeting, it is invaluable to your meeting and its participants to create these support systems.

Freebies: Time Tested Bridges

You may be interested in some T.I.M.E. back issues:

Blogs contained in the issued titled, **Marketing: Pre- and Post- Event (April 2003):** [Blogs \(04/03\) Back Issue](#)

Open Space Technology (March 2001): Use of this technique to create participant-generated agendas: [Open Space Technology \(03/01\) Back Issue](#)

Networking with (Freebie) Networking Ideas (March 2004): [Networking \(03/04\) Back Issue](#)

Freebies: Time Tested Bridges

Email me for my experience building brideges. I have experience with Learning Lounges, Best Practices Exchange and Blogs. stinnish@ameritech.net or click here [Time Tested Bridges](#)

Future T.I.M.E.

I will presenting 180+ Ways to Transform Your Meeting at [EMC Venues' Meeting Education Event & Tradeshow \(MEET\)](#) program on May 17, 2005 at 10:30 am - 12:00 noon at the Emory Conference Center Hotel, Atlanta, GA. You can register at:

<http://www.emcvenues.com/meetforum/atlantamain.cfm>
[EMC MEET - Atlanta](#)

On Tuesday, May 23, 2006, I will be at the [Washington State MPI chapter](#) presenting "[Four Walls and More...Creating Excellent Meeting Environments](#)". Their Monthly Luncheon Program is from 11:00 am - 1:00 pm in downtown Seattle at the Alexis Hotel. More information is at:
http://www.wscmpi.org/events/index.cfm?fuseaction=cal_cv&calID=48&tMonth48=1&eventCatView48=WSMPI

I will speaking at [Affordable Meetings](#) on Wednesday, June 14, 2006 at 1:15 pm – 2:30 pm in Long Beach, California, Come see me if you will be at that show. You can register at <http://www.affordablemeetings.com/west/register.htm> [Affordable Meetings](#)

I will also be at [EMC's MEET - Washington DC](#) during July 20 & 21 at the Inn & Conference Center at University of Maryland University College by Marriott in Adelphia, MD.

On November 15, I will be at the [Society of Government Meeting Planners Michigan Chapter](#) in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

I love to see familiar faces in the audience. Please come and see me.

On a personal note, I am very proud that my stepson, Ryan (you may have read about his graduation from college last May in that issue) is running to support a cure for breast cancer during the Y-Me race on Mother's Day. If you are inclined to support this worthy cause, I know Ryan would appreciate the support. You can make a pledge at http://main.y-me.org/site/TR?pg=personal&fr_id=1120&px=1540735
[Ryan Runs to Support A Cure for Breast Cancer](#)

In addition to writing and publishing T.I.M.E., I am also the founder and organizer of a women's networking and golfing group. Our activities include clinics, golfing (May - October) and social events during the cold months. We golf in the North/Northwest suburbs of Chicago. If you are interested in joining our fun, supportive group of women golfers, please email me and I will send you information about our upcoming schedule. [The Links Golfing Group](#) Or see our informational website at:
http://www.promos4biz.com/the_links_2006.asp
[The Links Golfing Group](#)

T.I.M.E. Gone By

If you are interested in past issues, please e-mail us with the month and topic and we will send you a copy of that newsletter. Here's what is included in past issues ([Back Issue Request](#)):

2000

Teambuilding (May), Green Meetings (June), Values (July), Minimum/Minimal Meetings (August), Evaluations (October), Politics (November), and Toys (December)

2001

Sales, Award Presentations (January), Change and Communicating Change (February), Open Space Technology (March), Adult Learning Styles (April), Trade Shows (May), Emotional Intelligence (June), Presentation Tips (July), Ice Breakers (August), Facilitation (September), Humor (October), Customer Care (November), Slack (December)

2002

Teambuilding Options (January), Promotional Products (February), Multicultural Communication

(March), Outdoor Learning (April), Budgets and ROK (May), Creativity (June), High Touch Technology (July), Economic and Business Cycles (August), Successful Environmental Factors/Conference Centers (September), Return on Investment (October), Incentive Meetings (November), Resource Recap (December)

2003

Everyday Meetings (January), Diversity (February), Problem Solving (March), Marketing Pre- and Post-Event (April), Entertainment (May), Balance in Meetings and child care (June), Mobile Events (July), Last Minute Ideas (August), Training Meetings (September), Unique Venues (October), Data, Information and Number Crunching Privacy (November), Deja View (December)

2004

Branding (January), Audio Visuals (February), Networking (March), Strategic Budgeting (April), Sensory Meetings (May), Board Meetings (June), Leadership (July), Barrier-free Meetings (August), Time Management & Meetings (September), The Travel Experience & Stress (October), Voting Techniques (November), Deja View II (December)

2005

New Year's Resolutions (January), Brainy Side of Food and Beverage (February), Sarbanes-Oxley and Meetings (March), Visual Aids (April), Experiential Teambuilding (May), Emotional Meetings (June), Press Conferences (July), Green Meetings (August), International Meetings (September), Value of Entertainment (October), Copyright Laws (November), Deja View III (December)

2006

New Year's Resolutions (January), Generational Differences (February), Speaker Suggestions (March)

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