



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

Topic: Entertainment, Ahhs, Haha's and Ahha's

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Welcome

Entertainment is often an essential element in meetings or events. And while entertainment is traditionally thought to be for entertainment value itself, I believe that entertainment is valuable on many more levels. Having returned from the International Association of Corporate Event Producers' Mid-Year meeting where I served on a panel, I am inspired to write an entertaining (hopefully) and relevant issue on entertainment in meetings and events.

This month, I also draw on the expertise and wisdom of Dick Smith, Chairman of the International Association of Corporate Event Producers, who also is the founder of communivisions llc. Dick supports me in many aspects of my professional life (MPI, my business, etc.) that I am happy to feature his thoughts this month. You can find Dick at 630.629.8500 or dsmith@communivisions.com [Dick Smith](#).

Sue

[Sue Tinnish](#)

Table of Contents

1. Infotainment
 2. The Big Secret
 3. Multiplicity
 4. Hidden Value
 5. Future Demand
 6. The Bottom Line
 7. Non-Meeting Examples
 8. Emotion, Branding, Entertainment and Business Objectives by Dick Smith
 9. Future T.I.M.E.
 10. T.I.M.E. Gone By
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Infotainment

Infotainment

I use this word in my session, 180+ Ways to Transform Your Meetings. In researching for this issue, I discovered that "infotainment" is a neologism (pronounced nee-AH-low-djism) or a newly invented word or term.

Wikipedia, on the web, defines infotainment as a general type of news media broadcast program which either provides a combination of current events news and entertainment programming, or an entertainment program structured in a news format. Infotainment generally refers to the segments of programming which overall consist of both "hard news" segments and interviews, along with celebrity interviews and human drama stories. Critics claim the combination of the two aspects creates a conflict of interest for news organizations—focusing them on marketing, not journalism. The term "infotainment" has pejorative undertones among those who hold professional journalistic values in esteem.

I don't see infotainment as being relegated only to the news or media world. Instead, meetings and meeting audiences expect information to be packaged in an entertaining way. So infotainment is an element in successful meetings.

Meeting participants demand meaningful information and interaction during meeting. Successful meetings will engage audiences' senses, minds and hearts in a, creative and strategically structured way.

Here's where the packaging of information and entertainment comes in.

The Big Secret

No, the secret does not involve a movie star any entertainers or gossip. Whether overtly stated it or not, the secret of successful entertainment at meetings and events isn't about creating an impressive "show". The secret is to know and fully understand each meeting's (or event) primary purpose, primary messages, and intent.

So it's more than a song, more than a dance, more than a laugh?

Definitely, and the more you unearth the "hidden value" in entertainment the easier you can justify the expense and time to bring in an act.

The next sections uncover the hidden value in entertainment.

Multiplicity

Howard Gardner developed the concept of Multiple Intelligence. Basically, he identified that people are "intelligent" in 7 ways. I suggest a person or occupation that would display that form of intelligence in parenthesis to offer you further insight to the idea of multiple intelligence.

1. Linguistic intelligence involves sensitivity to spoken and written language. (Hemingway, Robert Frost)
2. Logical-mathematical intelligence consists of the capacity to analyze problems logically, carry out mathematical operations, and investigate issues scientifically. (Einstein)
3. Musical intelligence involves skill in the performance, composition, and appreciation of musical patterns. (Mozart)
4. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence entails the potential of using one's whole body or parts of the body to solve problems. (Surgeons, Michael Jordan or the White

Sox – I am from Chicago!)

5. Spatial intelligence involves the potential to recognize and use the patterns of wide space and more confined areas. (Architects, Christopher Columbus)
6. Interpersonal intelligence is concerned with the capacity to understand the intentions, motivations and desires of other people. (Oprah, Mother Theresa)
7. Intrapersonal intelligence entails the capacity to understand oneself, to appreciate one's feelings, fears and motivations. (Freud)
8. Naturalist (added later) involves nature and the ability to commune with and survive in nature. (Darwin, Survivor winners)

Gardner's theory holds that people's intelligence varies based on the situation they find themselves in. I may be smarter than an Aborigine woman when solving a math problem but she is definitely smarter than me if we were in the bush in Australia.

Gardner's definition suggests that entertainment can appeal to a variety of forms of intelligence. For example:

People with Linguistic intelligence
respond to
jokes, puns, satire, funny stories and anecdotes

People with Visual-Spatial intelligence
like
cartoons, witty posters, funny pictures

People with Kinesthetic intelligence
respond to
humorous actions, role playing, audience participation, clowns

People with Musical intelligence
like
funny songs, jingles, rhythms and rhymes

People with Interpersonal intelligence and Intrapersonal intelligence
respond to
caricature, skits, pantomime

People with Mathematical intelligence
like
Puzzles, music, limericks

People with Naturalist intelligence
respond to
animals

Hidden Value

Entertainment can accomplish multiple things at a meeting. In addition to being

entertaining, entertainment can accomplish the following 9 things at your next meeting or event:

Set the mood/Change the mood

As meetings are emotional and rational experiences, you might want to change or set a mood in an environment. Consider the many ways that entertainment sets a mood in a room:

- Add warmth
- Create a welcoming atmosphere
- Create surprise or delight when used sparingly and at unexpected times
- Create suspense
- Add energy
- Calm or subdue

Meets us at different points

Many meetings endeavor to get people to change – to feel, believe or act differently. Change is a process and not an event. Individuals vary in levels of motivation or readiness to change. People at different points in the process of change can benefit from entertainment. Entertainment by its very nature allows for people to latch onto it in an emotional way. My response may vary from yours but each of us is likely to connect emotionally with an entertainer. (By emotional connection, I do not suggest that we “love” or sob out loud but simply that the audience is engaged, entertained and captivated.)

Entertainment can help “find” people at various points and reach out to them with a message. Everyone doesn't need to be at the same “place” to identify with the message.

Avoid the Hammer

Some subjects are too sensitive to broach head on – especially in a large group. The message can be “softened” through entertainment. Whether satire, humor, a skit or story, entertainers can be “spot” on with a message without alienating the audience.

The audience may not even be consciously aware of the sent message.

Entertainment offers another medium to reinforce the message without directly hammering it through the minds of your participants.

Cause Internal Reflection

Entertainment, by its nature, creates another version of reality. What happens on stage through magic or a play or other performance is real but the audience is an observer. This allows entertainment a platform to explore certain issues in a non-threatening way within meetings

Entertainment serves as a source for reflection, discussion and possibly change.

Explore safely

The superhero, the tightrope walker, the animal trainer -- these roles put entertainers in fearful situations with all the inherent dangers. Audiences live vicariously through these entertainers.

A clown because he or she is not "taken seriously," is permitted to attack the powerful. The clown allows the audience to laugh often with the audience maintaining the pretense that they are laughing at the clown, not at the butts of his humor.

The entertainment serves as a metaphor for business or organizational challenges. Corporate life requires the skill of a tightrope walker...Some of us wish we possessed the power of the clown to challenge a dysfunctional organization.

Entertainment, serving as a metaphor, gives us words and context to explore challenging issues.

Laugh at Ourselves

Entertainment, especially humor, creates opportunities to better understand ourselves by laughing at our mistakes in a non-threatening way.

Most organizations want to encourage an environment of risk-taking, creativity and innovation where people understand that making an honest mistake will not result in shame or anger. When we laugh at ourselves, we are more adept at picking ourselves up and starting over. Demonstrating this through entertainment allows the entertainer to model a very desirable skill.

Conquer Fear

In the business world being deficient is not strength. Showing fear of the unknown is not strength. However, regardless of how big and strong we adults are, when we are feeling deficient in some way, we experience distress, ranging from minor irritations to frustration to fear to outright terror.

Entertainment offers perspective, minimize the "fear" factor, or improve our understanding. The end result: When our understanding improves in such a way that we can now deal with a previously frightening situation, or when the situation changes, is removed, or avoided, we feel delight, relief and freedom.

An example that many of us may relate to will help clarify. Do you (or did you) experience math anxiety??

Math teacher and tutor Mark Wahl, author of *The Mathematical Mystery Tour* and other hands-on math resources, finds that humorous stories engage attention, clarify meaning in non-threatening ways, and motivate previously fearful students to work more confidently towards understanding the subject. Students can memorize math facts under stress, but the development of mathematical intelligence and its use in mathematical thinking is best done in a relaxed environment which humorous stories facilitate.

Foster Creativity

The essence of a joke is the bit of incongruity that is thrown in. We go down one path

when the punch line throws us for a loop and switches our thinking in a totally new and different direction.

Organizations are challenged with creating innovative cultures within their ranks.
Organizations are challenged to determine unique benefits for their customers.
Organizations are challenged to find unique ways of reaching their markets.

The essence of many entertainers is their uniqueness. The creativity involved in entertainment and the uniqueness can be a springboard for further creativity after the meeting.

Make it Local

Entertainment provides a local flair. You can tap into the local market for local folk art, children's groups, cultural entertainment or regional entertainment. This affords your meeting a unique flair and builds upon your site and theme.

Future Demand

Entertainment will only play a larger role in future meetings and events. A survey of how today's children learn indicates the increasing predominance of entertainment in the future.

Consider the American History "game", Revolution, where multiple players play a game in development at MIT (not exactly a party school) about the American Revolution. The players live in the US from 1773-1783, and assume roles as farmer, slave, politician or merchant. Or MeChEM, a game for middle schoolers learning chemistry and the properties of elements. Players select elements and strategies to equip their Mechs with armor, batteries, capacitors and weapons, and then battle to determine the strongest. This game won the Liemandt Foundation's first "Hidden Agenda" content in 2004. A team of college students from the University of Central Florida developed MeChEM.

Upcoming generations raised on Instant Messaging, MTV, the Internet, cell phones with more computing capability than my first desktop will expect far more entertainment in every aspect of their meetings and events.

The Bottom Line

Entertainment can help carry, reinforce, support, strengthen, emphasize and bolster your meeting's purpose and message. If you use entertainment as a time filler to simply entertain, then you have potentially received less value than existed.

Why entertainment works...Entertainment works because it is

- Engaging
- Interactive (possibly)
- Emotional
- Different

Entertainment works because it:

- Often contains music
- Often contains lighting
- Involves a story (usually)
- Provides a break
- Promotes movement (possibly)
- Provides a new medium (beats looking at PowerPoint slides)
- Often contains humor, lightheartedness or fun
- Serves as a metaphor
- Appeals to a variety of people on a variety of levels. It appeals to multiple forms of intelligence as defined by Gardner. And entertainment "touches" people on a variety of levels.

Caveat:

Entertainment alone can not save a poorly planned meeting or unclear message.

Real World Examples

These real world examples draw upon media infotainment to demonstrate the power and impact. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) uses entertainment to further their serious agenda of decreasing HIV and family planning.

In Tanzania, a radio soap opera, "Twende na Wakati", provides evidence that entertainment education has an impact by stimulating interpersonal peer communication. The behavior change occurred not only through direct exposure to the radio broadcasts, but from such exposure coupled with peer discussion of the episodes. UNFPA showed that at least a quarter of all those who adopted family planning reported that they did so because of listening to the soap opera. Listeners were more likely than non-listeners to discuss family planning with their spouses/partners. The program had a positive effect on the degree to which listeners believed that they control their own future.

Or a comic book character in Cameroon tells the story of a young woman that overcomes the stigma of HIV and comes to terms with her situation to become a HIV/AIDS awareness advocate. The UNFPA-sponsored production promotes positive youth action and awareness on the issue.

Sources of information: http://www.population.org/casestudy_03_twende.shtml
<http://www.popcouncil.org/frontiers/orsummaries/ors37.html>

Emotion, Branding, Entertainment and Business Objectives

Written by Dick Smith

Editorial note: Dick's introduction identifies his work in the corporate market. His

comments apply equally to associations.

After nearly thirty years of booking and producing corporate entertainment programs, it has become obvious to me that if companies could accomplish their goals and objectives without ever booking entertainment, or without ever having a meeting or event they would never bother to waste their time and money doing so!

I have come to believe the only reason companies put on meetings and have entertainment at those meetings is to do one of three things;

1. Raise revenues (sell more)
2. Increase profits (or lower costs)
3. Enhance or build their brand.

These are the only goals that a Senior Level Executive must have for putting on meetings and events, including those with entertainment.

An emotional connection to the entertainment usually qualifies it as an important or major meeting element deserving the attention of the Senior Level Executive. The Senior Level Executive is ultimately the decision maker on major and emotional elements of the meeting and the person most responsible for the success of the meeting.

The quality and type of entertainment makes a statement about the organization, the audience and its culture. That's what makes it a "Senior Level Decision".

If you "get this" whether you are an entertainer, an agent, producer or meeting planner, it becomes obvious what you need to focus on. To get the attention of the real decision maker, focus on how your entertainment, meeting site or service can help the organization achieve its goals of higher sales volume, increased profits or enhanced brand. As a consequence, you will stand out from your competition with a strong competitive advantage.

Of course you still need "table stakes", that is to be a good act, great meeting site or outstanding service. Being focused on what's most important to the Senior Level Executive, who owns the meeting will go a long way in getting you noticed.

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Freebies: HaHa's and AhHa's

Freebies:

Joel Goodman, who directs The Humor Project, (<http://www.humorproject.com>) states that the word HAHA has the Latin root of AHA. Goodman restates what man has known for a long time. There is a link between being relaxed, having fun and learning or new realizations. Entertainment can also be informative supporting the overall message of the meeting.

More Freebies: I read some outstanding books on the brain and learning - non-scientific with applications for meetings. If you are interested in my resource list, email me and I will send you a Brainy Resource List. [Brain Books](#)

Future T.I.M.E.

Thank you to the [International Association of Corporate Entertainment Producers](#) for their hospitality during their Mid-year Members Meeting in Chicago on Monday, September 26. It's an amazing new organization and if you have an interest in entertainment or joining go to their website at www.iacep.com or at <http://www.iacep.com>.

I will presenting 180+ Ways to Transform Your Meeting at [EMC Venues' Meeting and Event Planners Education Forum/Tradeshow](#) program on November 17, 2005 at The Palace at Somerset Park, Somerset, NJ.

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

Off the subject of innovative meetings, a group of innovative women will see [Wicked in Chicago on Wednesday, November 16](#). Our seats are in the first rows of the regular balcony, rows E and F. Tickets for this section are normally \$67.30 per ticket. (\$55.50 per ticket + \$9.30 handling charge + \$2.50 facility charge + \$4.50 per order = \$67.30 not including the one-time order fee.) I have 5 tickets still available for the bargain price of \$60.00. Join a group of creative, fun business women. Please email me if interested at: stinnish@ameritech.net or click here [Wicked Tickets](#)

Finally, my subscriber base only grows through word of mouth of my subscribers. I would really appreciate it if you would forward T.I.M.E. onto your colleagues, associates, and clients. Just press the forward button at the end of the newsletter.

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