



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

Topic: Visual Communication

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Welcome

From the drawings in the Ardeche Valley of France to the Guttenberg's printing press, humans have found ways to communicate visually - via pictures or the printed word.

Meetings rely heavily upon visual communication - handouts, PowerPoint slides, reports, etc. This issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events explores the full repertoire of visual communication tools (text, flip charts, PowerPoint). And it delves into another area of visual communication for meetings - graphic facilitation.

I had the pleasure to learn about graphic facilitation from Brandy Agerbeck, of Loosetooth.com, at a recent conference on facilitation techniques. My horizons were expanded and this issue will widen your world of ideas for innovative meetings and events.

Welcome to Brandy. I know you will enjoy her words and images in this issue.

Sue
[Sue Tinnish](#)

PS I have been writing and publishing this newsletter for 7 years as of this month. Call it the 7-year itch...watch for a new look to Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events in the coming months.

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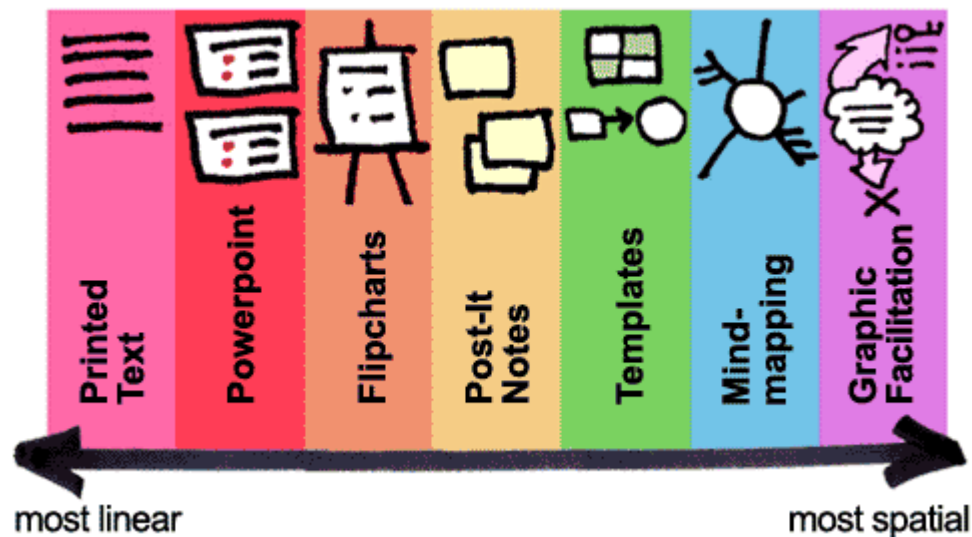
Visual Communication

Visual communication includes art, signs, photography, typography, drawing, graphic design, illustration, color and electronic resources. Visual communication is an interdisciplinary approach bringing together anthropology, communication studies, semiotics (the study of signs), media and cultural studies, sociology, and the theory and practice of visual design.

Words are a well understood form of communication. This newsletter is an attempt to show the power of images. (This is not to suggest that meetings don't need spoken or written words.) Some argue that images are becoming more important in our society. Everyday we experience a blitz of images. Images appear in our newspapers, magazines, books, clothing, billboards, computer monitors and television screens as never before in the history of mass communications. Dr. Paul Martin Lester, Professor of Communications at California State University, states that "for many, understanding of the world is being accomplished, not through reading words, but by reading images."

(Source: Lester, Paul Martin. 2006. Syntactic Theory of Visual Communication. Retrieved from <http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/lester/writings/viscomtheory.html>)

This issue of Tips for Innovative Meetings and Events will help expand your view of visual communication. This is your opportunity to discover the power of images to inform, educate and persuade individuals. We will discuss seven forms of visual communication with an in-depth focus on graphic facilitation.



Spectrum of Visual Communication

There are seven visual tools we will review:

1. Text
2. PowerPoint
3. Flipcharts

4. Post-it Notes
5. Mindmapping
6. Templates
7. Graphic Facilitation

(Source: Information taken from Brandy Agerbeck's presentation)

Comparing Visual Tools

Here are some of the pluses (+) and negatives (-) of the various visual tools:

Text

- + Specific meaning
- + Familiar medium
- Promotes linear thinking
- Requires lots of text to describe complex situations
- Requires time to reach consensus on "text"
- Contributes to information overload

PowerPoint

- + Integrates text, photos, models, animation, audio and video
- + Projection allows viewing in large meetings
- + Accessible
- One way communication; not collaborative
- Encourages reading off slides

Flipcharts

- + Mobile medium for sharing
- + Encourages drawing
- + Larger Scale
- List-heavy
- Illegibility

Post It Notes

- + Affordable and accessible
- + Captures individual ideas
- + High potential for spatial organizations in lists, clusters, etc.
- + Captures individual ideas
- + Less pressure to draw
- Difficult to photograph/archive

Templates or Models

- + Framework to work within
- + Shared language
- + Can revisit
- Poor matching of template/model to issue is problematic
- Fill-in-the-box mentality can lead to less complex thinking

Mindmapping (more details below)

- + Easy to learn

- + Spatial adaptation of linear outline form
- + Built in hierarchical
- Hub and spoke shape may not be suitable for all issues

Tony Buzan developed the technique of creating MindMaps in the late 1960s. A MindMap harnesses the full range words, images, numbers, logic, rhythm, color and spatial awareness in a single drawing. To learn more about this visual communication technique, I included information in my past newsletter Problem Solving Techniques from March 2003 or go to www.mind-map.com. [Mind Mapping as a Problem Solving Techniques](#) or [Mindmapping website](#)

Graphic Facilitation

- + One person dedicated to synthesizing group discussion
- + Real-time capture
- + Diagram and model complex ideas
- + Very large scale
- Not suitable for quick conversations

A Look at Graphic Facilitation

Written by Brandy Agerbeck, graphic facilitator, Loosetooth.com, brandy@loosetooth.com, www.loosetooth.com. Find her directly through these links: [Brandy's email](#) [Brandy's website](#)

When asked, "So, what do you do?" I answer, "I've got a very strange job. I map conversation while groups are meeting. It's called graphic facilitation."

It is the practice of using words and images to create a conceptual map of a conversation. I am the visual, usually silent partner to the traditional, verbal facilitator. I draw a huge image at the front of the room in real-time with markers on a big sheet of paper (often 4 feet by 8 feet). Here are two concepts that drive me and my work.

Words Fail

Echoing the Lester quote above, we're an ever more visual culture. The vast mountain of information we face can't be climbed by text alone anymore. We need visual literacy to see patterns, spot themes, make better decisions. Graphic facilitators create maps that allow us to understand the world around us and find clarity. Sure we still use words, but we combine them our critical thinking, spatial organization and images to synthesize a complex conversation into an integrated image.

Get Out of Your Own Head

Picture yourself in another meeting. You're half-listening to Mary and half-worrying how you're going to explain her mandate to your team. You tune out Phil's comments because Phil is always spouting unproductive Phil-isms. In that meeting you're simultaneously thinking of your work, goals, deadlines, boss, boss's bosses, your team, their deadlines, culture, politics and the company's mission or bottom line.

As a graphic facilitator, I come in as an outsider. With no political involvement or looming deadline, I can listen to everyone equally. Out of the conversation, I build a map. I capture detailed concerns alongside the main themes. Since I don't know Phil, I can capture the gem within his comment. I pair Mary's mandate along with your concern on how to communicate it. I facilitate the group by drawing a picture of what's being said, so everyone can, pardon the overused phrase, be on the same page. This image focuses and facilitates the participants in that moment, and serves as a document of that meeting's progress.

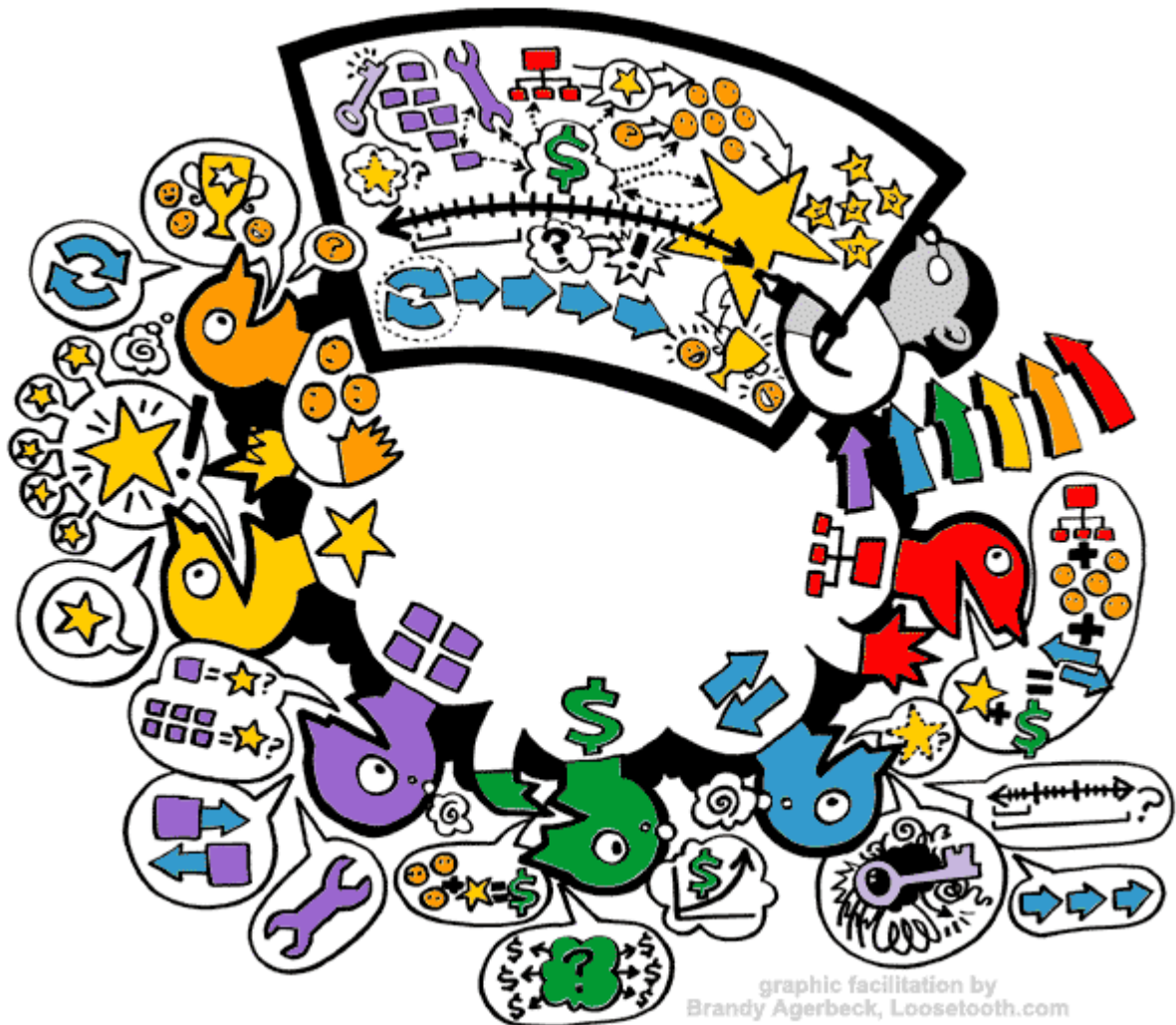
I've created a non-verbal image (see below) to illustrate the dynamics between a graphic facilitator, a team and their ideas. You can see how a graphic facilitator distills the conversation into the salient points.

Ways a graphic facilitator can help you:

- Designing templates or worksheets for participants to use.
- Building a model of your process to focus your team around
- Capturing and synthesizing your conversation in real-time
- Developing a roadmap or mapping the landscape of an initiative or an entire company
- Distilling large amounts of information into summary graphics
- Creating images after an event to share progress, maintain momentum and communicate to others

To see more of my work, I invite you to visit my portfolio at GraphicFacilitator.com. Click here: GraphicFacilitator.com I can be contacted at brandy@loosetooth.com. [Brandy's email](#)

I encourage any visual tools to help people express and share their ideas towards better problem solving. Pick up the post-it note! Pick up the pen!



Benefits of Graphic Facilitation

Graphic facilitation offers benefits for participants as well as benefiting the process of distilling the issue.

For the Participants

- Draws participants in and supports engagement
- Acknowledges and incorporates participants' ideas immediately
- Helps people understand large, complex problems
- Brings people together around a shared language and common focus
- Enlivens the meetings through a dynamic creative process

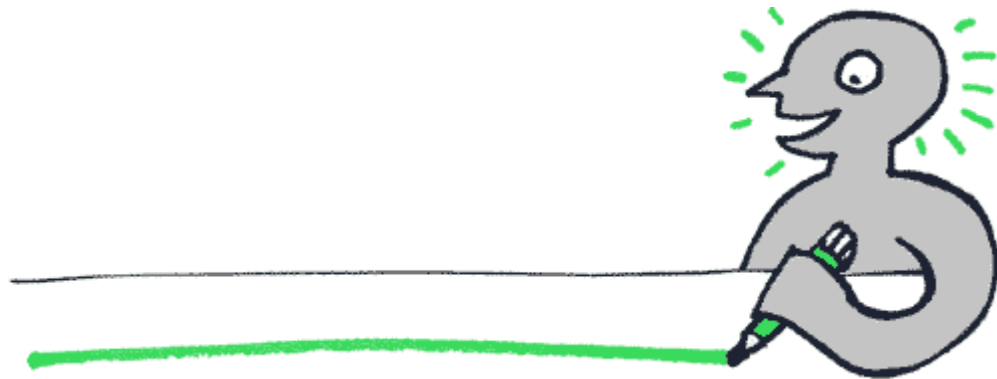
For the Issue

- Captures diverse opinions, vantage points and strategies in one picture

- Makes connections between thoughts to develop a systemic view
- Illustrates a complex flow of activity in a simple, powerful way
- Reflects back the expression of multiple vantage points and opinions
- Leaves a readily accessible record of the issues after the meeting

For the Process

- Creates a structure to organize information
- Provides an explicit structure for thinking
- Provides a common focus that brings people together
- Engages the emotional as well as the rational
- Draws out creative thinking
- Facilitates the resolution of conflicts by going beyond a solely verbal approach
- Supports rational analysis with metaphor and visualization
- Surfaces connections and opportunities that weren't otherwise apparent
- Manages the complexity of group discussions
- Creates an evolving, visual dialogue that constantly provides new meaning and insight
- Provides a graphic "road map" of developments
- Enables richness of the whole picture to be seen at a glance
- Increases productivity and understanding
- Creates a great visual memory tool
- Provides a "group memory" of the event



The bottom line: The value of graphic facilitator is that they:

- Capture the essence of ideas and information
- Mirror, not only the content, but also the process the group is going through
- Organize ideas and information in ways that help people see patterns and relationships

Where You Will See Graphic Facilitators

Graphic facilitators like other facilitators can help along almost any type of meeting. Consider the possibilities for meeting types and issues!

Meetings that can benefit from graphic facilitation:

- Blue-sky sessions
- Brainstorming sessions
- Change management
- Community meetings
- Input sessions
- Leadership retreats
- Public forums
- Public input sessions
- Retreats

You may also find that graphic facilitation works for board meetings, conferences, conflict management sessions, dialogue sessions, focus groups, mediation, product and service development, sales meetings, scenario planning meetings, stakeholder meetings, strategic planning, symposiums, town meetings or workshops.

Issues that graphic facilitation can tackle:

- Branding
- Change management
- Complex adaptive systems
- Conflict resolution
- Curriculum design
- Ideation and brainstorming
- Implementation strategies
- Legacy planning
- Leadership development
- Measures and accountability
- Operational issues
- Organizational development
- Product design
- Product development
- Rapid prototyping
- Restructuring
- Scenario planning
- Systems thinking
- Training and education
- Vision and positioning

Real World Examples

Here are three examples of using visual communication:

1. Kimberly-Clark
Kimberly-Clark, the global consumer products company, had a challenge to teach 15,000 employees about supply chain management. Traditional efforts of meetings and PowerPoint presentations were not working consistently for all employees. Kimberly-Clark's director of organizational effectiveness, Michael Fischer's solution was part simulation, part game and part video presentation called Go To Market. This education program about Kimberly-Clark's supply chain presented to small teams of employees

the supply-chain issues on a discovery map. (Think of a discovery map as a combination of a game board, a map and a chart.) Go To Market also had a second discovery map, which guided employees through a discussion about the future of Kimberly-Clark's supply chain. Teams earned points for finding information on the map. After the sessions, employee participants said that they understood for the first time how Kimberly-Clark's supply chain really worked. Later, Go To Market helped broaden understanding outside the company, as Kimberly-Clark's main transportation company, suppliers, and even some of its advertising and media companies went through the program. In the final "call to action" segment, session facilitators encouraged meeting participants to suggest ways to eliminate waste and redundancies in Kimberly-Clark's supply chain. Employees found an impressive \$275 million in cost savings.

The bottom line about Go To Market : "In every case, we got these same comments back," Fischer says. "'Now I understand Kimberly-Clark, now I understand what I can do to help you with Go To Market.'"

(Source: Dolezalek, Holly. August 01, 2003. Pretending To Learn. Retrieved from http://www.trainingmag.com/msg/search/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1943176)

2. Strategic Planning

Academics and consultants have developed an arsenal of tools to help companies understand their strategic positioning, and many of those tools have yielded successful strategies. W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne have an approach—drawing a strategy canvas. The strategy canvas shows three things in one picture. First, it shows the strategic profile of an industry by depicting the factors that affect competition among industry players, as well as future competitive factors. Second, it shows the strategic profile of current and potential competitors, identifying which factors they invest in strategically. Finally, it draws the company's strategic profile—or value curve—showing how it invests in the factors of competition and how it might invest in them in the future.

W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne state, "Drawing a strategy canvas is not, of course, the only part of the strategic-planning process. At some stage, numbers and documents must be compiled and discussed. But we believe that the details will fall into place more easily if managers start with the big picture. Completing the four steps of visualizing strategy will put strategy back into strategic planning, and it will greatly improve your chances of coming up with a winning formula."

(Source: W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne, 2002, July. Charting Your Company's Future - Your Company Strategy in Pictures. Retrieved from <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/3020.html>)

3. Google

Google has dozens of whiteboards placed in common areas and corridors throughout its headquarters. Some are designated specifically for business (i.e., used by product teams to swap ideas). But the two largest ones, about 30 feet long, are devoted to the equivalent of corporate graffiti. One is packed with cartoons and jokes that workers have scrawled under the slogan "Google's Plan for World Domination."

(Source: Center for Graphic Facilitation blog at www.graphicfacilitation.blogspot.com)

Other organizations like Sears and the US Army have successfully used visual techniques to communicate key information. Are you fully taking advantage of visual communication??

Tips for Meetings

Tip 1: Use visuals for explaining the meeting management process

Create a stakeholder map showing your relationships with stakeholders and clients. Use this map as the basis for identifying ways to maintain and improve your stakeholder relationships.

Use post-it notes to identify all the key players and interactions and build an adaptive map quickly and easily. Consider making a "Before" and "After" map to compare where you are and where you want to be.

Tip 2: Space Needs

Graphic Facilitation has very particular space requirements. The biggest consideration is wall space. Plenty of flat, smooth wall space, at standing height and within hearing and seeing distance of the participants is needed. A graphic facilitator works best at the front of the room, where everyone can see their ideas taking shape. If a truly flat wall isn't available (without trim, sconces, radiators, etc), a temporary wall can be constructed. Talk through these logistics beforehand to best utilize the skills of a graphic facilitator.

Tip 3: . Right Tools for the Job

When introducing visual tools, think through scale and legibility. While working on flipcharts, have big, bright markers available to write with. Take out lighter colors, which would be illegible at a distance.

If you are problem solving with post-it notes, consider the scale and the pens you use. A team of twenty will have a hard time focusing on a wall of square 3-inch post-it notes scribbled with ball point pens. Instead give them bigger post-its, Sharpie markers, and explicitly ask everyone to write neatly. Build you post-it note map on a big pieces of paper so it's movable. Better yet, build it where the team works, so they can refer to it and adapt it over time.

Thinking about these small details will improve communication and facilitate understanding in the moment and in long run.

Tip 4: Capturing and Archiving the Visual Work

Think about how the visual work of the participants or graphic facilitator will be saved. Sometimes flipcharts are temporary images to work through ideas. Other times real decisions are made or details captured. Make sure everyone knows what will happen with their work and how and to whom it will be distributed. If a great template got everyone working together, make sure the team has that template to use in the future. On the other hand, if someone made a comic drawing illustrating the company's problem, assure them that it's not going into the company newsletter. Consider the lifespan of these images and how they can help the team move forward.

Freebies: Great Reading and Improving Graphics

Freebies: Great Reading

You may be interested in several past issues of T.I.M.E.:

April 2005 Visual Aids [Visual Aids](#)

November 2005 The Price of Innovation [The Price of Innovation](#)

September 2001 Facilitation [Facilitation](#)

July 2001 Presentation Tips [Presentation Tips](#)

Or use this link for immediate access via the web:

[Back issues on www.suetinnish.com](#)

Edward Tufte has authored several books on the effective use of graphics. The goal of any chart, graph or graphic is not only to communicate statistical information in a clear way. The real job is to tell a story that aids decision-making. Become a better story teller with visuals. You can learn more about his books:

[The Visual Display of Quantitative Information](#)

[Beautiful Evidence](#)

[The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within, Second Edition](#)

More Freebies: Adding Visual Interest to PowerPoint

Ditch clip art. PowerFrameworks is an online gallery of shapes, professionally designed and ready to download into your presentation. The site offers tips on how to use the images to create powerful visual metaphors. Subscription fee is \$249.95.

To create more visual interest, use photos. But remember, many photos on the web are protected by copyright. Here are three sites with free photos for downloading:

<http://www.bigfoto.com/>

<http://www.sxc.hu/> Stock.XCHNG

<http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/index2.php?cat=39>

There are also many royalty free sites that charge a nominal amount for photos.

If you are interested in more about copyright laws and what you can and can't copy legally, I encourage you to refer to the November 2005 issue on Intellectual Property. [Copyright Laws](#). I will also be podcasting a 15 minute interview on this topic in May.

I will send you a link to the podcast when it is available (after May 18) if you email me at sue@suetinnish.com or click here [The Price of Creativity Podcast](#).

[Past issues of T.I.M.E. on the web at www.suetinnish.com](#)

Future T.I.M.E.

I will be presenting at

HSMAI's Affordable Meetings West
Tuesday, June 19 & Wednesday, June 20, 2007

San Jose McEnery Convention Center
San Jose, CA

[HSMAl's Affordable Meetings West](http://www.affordablemeetings.com/west.html) or <http://www.affordablemeetings.com/west.html>

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

Virtual T.I.M.E. and T.I.M.E. Gone By

Back issues are posted on my website at www.suetinnish.com. Check there for virtual resources.

Or if the issue is not on the website, 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](#)):

2007

Chaos & Meetings (January)
Signage and Wayfinding (February)
Building BEST Teams (Supplier Teams (March)
Complete Meeting Package and Conference Centers (April)

2006

New Year's Resolutions (January), Generational Differences (February), Speaker Suggestions (March), Building Bridges (April), Positive Posters (May), Cruises (June), Moving Knowledge and Talent (July), Relaxing Meetings (August), Keynotes (September), Podcasting (October), Unique Meeting Venues (November), Deja View (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)

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)

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)

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)

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)

2000

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

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