

Why 'edutainment' means more engaged delegates

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Personal development expert Ross McWilliam examines ways of helping delegates get more from conferences.



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Ross McWilliam is a personal development and mindset expert who has spoken at numerous conferences. He works to empower business people and their employees to make positive change.

"The common North American saying of, 'you gotta get bang for your buck' refers to the ability of getting the best possible value when purchasing anything," says McWilliam. "Never has this been more true than in today's conference and event marketplace."

"With an ever-increasing number of conferences and events on offer, potential delegates are searching out this 'bang for your buck' and organisers are using different strategies to seduce delegates to buy from them.

"This could be discounted and early bird tickets, preferential seating, VIP access areas, exclusive social media coverage, even celebrity endorsements.

"But beyond these obvious perks, the actual engagement techniques of the conference speakers are an area where a conference can really stand out."

According to McWilliam, conference speakers generally fall into two categories:

- Full-on knowledge transfer, where the delegates are absorbing as much information as possible from the expert speaker. This can be a one-way street with little opportunity for interaction, or even challenge. Learning occurs, but it is often a long, hard slog to keep attention spans active.

- Anecdotal stories of ‘success’ that involve the recounting of many ‘name drops’ and which can be quite enjoyable, even motivational. However, this type of speaker generally often leaves delegates with no takeaways to improve themselves, either personally, or indeed, in the workplace.

"There is, however, an opportunity for more interactivity at conferences, in both keynote and seminar styles," says McWilliam.

"This would allow delegates to become more active participants in the knowledge transfer, and by being more involved, learning can be greatly enhanced, with takeaways becoming more bespoke, relevant and memorable, so positive change is a more likely outcome. This has been termed ‘edutainment.’

"Examples of this edutainment are audience participation during the keynote/seminar, and various pre, mid and post event feedback activities that inform learning and even alter the direction of the keynote speech.

"Equally, using delegates as a central part of the conference keynote/seminar, perhaps in a live case study, illustrates not only the worth and versatility of the speaker, but it can give a real feel of spontaneity and fun for the other delegates.

"Linked to this, conference organisers might want to look at the option of using ‘conference mentors’ to assist individuals, or small groups, guiding and supporting them either through their conference and/or learning experience. This can put delegates at ease, and can make learning easier and even fun.

"Whether you are aware of it or not, the rise of the edutainment conference has already started... are you on board?"