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Understanding Your Attendees: The Key to Event Success

By Banks Sadler

The success of any event hinges on the attendee experience. You want attendees to be enthusiastic about coming, to be engaged while they're there, and to leave feeling that their experience was worthwhile. Attendees come in a variety of personas each with varying expectations and motivations that affect how they experience an event. How do you make sure that events you create have a positive impact on the people who come to them? Success begins with getting to know your audience members — what motivates them, what makes them engage or disengage. Tailoring your event design to create meaningful, personal connections with attendees will ultimately help you drive behavior change and create value for your business. In this paper, we explore some common event attendee profiles and offer corresponding design recommendations as starting points that you can adapt to your organization and events.



THE KNOWLEDGE SEEKER

Knowledge Seekers are always looking for opportunities to learn something that can help them better their career, build a business case, or gain a more complete understanding of an industry or a product. Therefore, the educational agenda of your event may drive the Knowledge Seeker's decision to attend, while the quality of the presenters and the content of the sessions will determine how they rate their experience.

How to Design Events for the Knowledge Seeker

- Conduct pre-event surveys to tailor your content to their needs
- Invest in the main speaker to pique interest and keep their attention
- Offer a choice of education tracks to ensure they find something that interests them
- Provide post-event information to extend their learning experience
- Include app features to allow them to easily find speaker bios, take notes, and gather session materials
- Add interest with out-of-the-box learning environments and creative meetings space set-ups
- Consider including sessions that allow for two-way interaction between speakers and attendees

WHY DO THEY ATTEND?

To take advantage of engaging learning experiences



PROFILE SNAPSHOT

Looks for opportunities to learn to better their career

Seeks to gain industry knowledge

Makes attendance decision based on agenda and speakers

Bases their experience rating on session content



THE TECH-SAVVY NETWORKER

Tech-Savvy Networkers are active, plugged-in attendees. They value personal relationships and seek out ways to make meaningful connections that can help them achieve their goals. Events are made for the Tech-Savvy Networker, providing them with targeted opportunities to meet the right people and have productive conversations. They are always on, taking any chance they get to make new connections and engage with new people. And engagement goes beyond face-to-face conversations. These attendees are multitaskers who will engage with others through a variety of platforms, including apps, and will continue the conversation even after the event ends.

How to Design Events for the Tech-Savvy Networker

- Include features in your app to help them find and connect with the right contacts, as well as to store their virtual business cards
- Enable gamification in your app to feed their need for multiple ways to connect
- Offer speed networking sessions
- Provide them with ample opportunities to meet up with people
- Supply them with the attendee list prior to the event
- Engage them in the app to keep the conversation going even post-event

WHY DO THEY ATTEND?

To build their contact list



PROFILE SNAPSHOT

Plugged-in professional

Values personal relationships

Sets event goals

Always “ON” multitasker

Seeks meaningful connections

Looks for opportunities to have productive conversations

Continues conversations beyond event via multiple platforms



THE INSPIRATION SEEKER

Inspiration Seekers are always looking for purpose in their personal and business endeavors. They value emotional connections and prefer having experiences to sitting in conference rooms or lecture halls. The Inspiration Seeker is creative and vibrant and will be absorbed in each moment of the event. They also have high expectations and want to leave an event with a changed outlook. Ideally they will leave the event with a specific action, process, or idea they can share with their coworkers and incorporate into their day-to-day.

How to Design Events for the Inspiration Seeker

- Deliver highly motivational content through a variety of methods, such as powerful keynote speakers, 1:1 coaching sessions, and content tailored to attendees' business and personal objectives
- Offer immersive experiences that connect the Inspiration Seeker to local culture
- Give opportunities to participate in brainstorming or co-creation sessions
- Provide alternative venues that will take them outside of the traditional meeting space
- Consider community outreach experiences or corporate social responsibility endeavors
- Involve them in the event. Don't just speak to them, speak with them, engage them

WHY DO THEY ATTEND?

To find personal inspiration and engage in transformational experiences



PROFILE SNAPSHOT

Looks for meaning and purpose

Values emotional connections

Prefers experiences vs lectures

Creative, vibrant

Possesses high expectations



THE SOCIAL BUTTERFLY

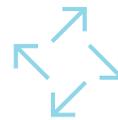
Social Butterflies can be your greatest allies. Because they love meeting new people, connecting with others who share common interests, as well as socializing with friends and colleagues, they bring energy and enthusiasm to the mix. They're truly interested in meeting, greeting, and learning, eager to engage at every touchpoint, and prefer interactions that involve more casual social opportunities such as cocktails, meals, and entertainment over confined structured networking. And, when they're having a good time, they're happy to spread the word on social media.

How to Design Events for the Social Butterfly

- Make sure there are plenty of opportunities for interaction in breakout sessions
- Choose informal meal settings, rather than seated events, to allow for socializing
- Include entertainment and leisure activities in your agenda
- Consider how the Social Butterfly can be a powerful influencer, helping to communicate your key messages and build excitement with other attendees — consider asking them to be speakers or event committee members
- Give them opportunities to be social leaders through your event app — consider in-app games such as a points system for posting pictures, commenting, and sharing to social media, if appropriate for your event type

WHY DO THEY ATTEND?

To make key industry connections, see and be seen, meet and greet



PROFILE SNAPSHOT

Looks forward to meeting new people

Loves to socialize with colleagues and friends

Enthusiastic, high energy

Eager to meet, greet, engage and learn

Prefers casual social interaction

Spreads the word via social media



THE RELUCTANT ATTENDEE

The Reluctant Attendee is likely an introvert who finds attending events about as appealing as a dentist visit. This is your most challenging target audience, because just getting them to show up can be a huge hurdle. Reluctant Attendees may feel overwhelmed by the experience and the social demands of events. They may be awkward with small talk and feel uncomfortable socializing with people they don't know. It's likely they're attending the event because they feel obliged to do so for personal or professional reasons.

How to Design Events for the Reluctant Attendee

- Create opportunities for attendees to get to know each other early in the agenda to help them feel more comfortable throughout the event and want to participate more
- Use your event app to make recommendations to nudge the attendee to try other things based on what they liked
- Consider providing meeting and breakout session choices where possible so the attendee feels in control of their experience
- Point out content that is forward-thinking or based on new research as it may hold more appeal to this attendee type
- Allow free time and space for disengagement as this type of attendee often needs downtime to recharge
- Consider incorporating on-demand and/or virtual sessions to allow them to attend the event in their own comfort zone – from their office or home
- For non-mandatory meetings, be certain the invitation clearly states the benefits of attending

WHY DO THEY ATTEND?

To meet their obligation



PROFILE SNAPSHOT

Likely an introvert

May be overwhelmed by the experience

Not a small talker

Uncomfortable socializing with new people

Feels obligated to attend



THE BRAND FANATIC

The Brand Fanatic is a dedicated follower who identifies with a brand's culture and feels connected to its other devotees. They may feel that the brand lends them a certain status that they find enjoyable. The Brand Fanatic is always looking for the next big thing, "the inside scoop." The Brand Fanatic craves the wow factor, wants consistency in experience, and enjoys attending high-level events. In addition to owning the brand's products or services, the Brand Fanatic may also follow the brand on social media, own gear or accessories that identify them as a fan of the brand, and possibly even invest in the company.

How to Design Events for the Brand Fanatic

- Include plenty of gear and opportunities for them to showcase their brand loyalty
- Provide access to key brand representatives, unique brand-centric experiences and product information
- Offer them chances to win exclusive brand merchandise and experiences
- Provide exciting product demonstrations along with early access to new products/services
- Keep brand top of mind from end-to-end, from the initial invitation through mobile app experiences to exclusive event experiences
- Hold "user group panels" to give a forum for brand fanatics to share insight and ideas

WHY DO THEY ATTEND?

To experience and enjoy the culture with other brand fanatics



PROFILE SNAPSHOT

Dedicated follower

Brand loyal

Looks for "the inside scoop"

Craves the WOW factor

Enjoys high-level events

Wants experience consistent with brand

Likely social media savvy

Conclusion

Regardless of the kind of event you plan, you are likely to have a mix of different attendee types. And that's great, because events are about the people who go to them – and the energy, knowledge and enthusiasm they bring through the door. With large meetings or conferences, you may be able to appeal to all attendee types by including multiple elements that will let them build their own itineraries and create their own experiences. With smaller events, take a look across attendee types and try to appeal to the likely majority. Remember, everyone who attends brings a unique perspective and can be an asset to you and other attendees. Understanding what motivates different types of audience members and catering to their needs will keep them engaged and make your events even more memorable and impactful.

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