

Best and Worst Elements of an Event

Item	Best	Worst
Timing	Mornings, 9:00-12:00, while people are awake and alert.	Afternoons, after lunch or during cocktails. People are sleepy, tired and mentally drained.
Length	Three hour session with a break - or a 90 minute session without a break.	One hour; (too short to establish rapport and deliver enough content). Two hours; (too long for one session, yet too short to give a break).
Start time	Start precisely on time, regardless of where attendees are'. This establishes the tone of this and future meetings. It shows respect for those who arrived on time and keeps the rest of your event on track. Someone must begin moving the crowd and making announcements 5-10 minutes ahead.	Late starts and creeping delays show disrespect for those who are present. It will "domino" for the rest of the day. No one will respect your next event times and you'll forever start late. (The people who are late are already frustrated. The ones present aren't...yet.)
Breaks	One for every 90 minutes. Shorter if they are staying in the same room, longer if they're changing rooms.	No breaks or short breaks. (If you worry about losing people at the break, then the break isn't the problem; it's the program.)
Setup	Center stage, center screen, chairs close to the stage to create energy and intimacy.	High stages too far from the audience kill the energy of the room.
Seating	Theater style, semi-circular; keeping the audience close and tight to the stage and speaker. This setup maintains eye contact and creates energy.	Round tables that spread the audience out and positions attendees facing each other instead of the front. U-shape.
Chairs	Fill the front rows first. Set for 10% under actual attendance, so more chairs have to be brought in. Creates response: "The seminar was so good they had to bring in more chairs!"	Empty front rows with people seated in the back. Over-seated by any amount allowing this to happen. (Hotels will usually try to over-seat, so they won't have to bring in more chairs.)
Lighting	Bright room. All lights on, all shades open.	Dimming for the projector. (Get a brighter Projector...don't darken the room.)
Sound	Quality system, wireless lapel mike, multiple ceiling speakers, tested to be clear. (Professional option: Sound engineer with remote sound system and mixer.)	Old style, self-contained lectern. Hand held, hard wired microphones with short cords. Sound is critical to having a successful event.
Coffee	Before the session and during breaks. Cream & sugar at a separate station.	Attendees must find and purchase their own.
Introduction	A skilled introducer who is enthusiastic, has heard the speaker, is familiar with the introduction, and comfortable with public speaking. MUST use a microphone, preferably separate from the speaker's.	A last minute selection, of someone unfamiliar with the introduction, uncomfortable with an audience and who fears microphones saying; "Oh, I won't need that", then gives a lackluster introduction or makes fun of the speaker.

Site Selection

Choose a site that is conveniently located to the majority of your audience (or equally inconvenient to all)! Preferably one that is easy to get to and that offers free and convenient parking facilities. Following is a good criteria for selection:

Convenience

Choose a place that is well known and has easy access.

Parking

This is important. The loudest gripes come from inconvenient or expensive parking.

Image

The site you choose represents your image and the value you place on attendees.

On site staff

Select a site where the staff will help you make the meeting a success.

Sound

Bad sound has killed many a meeting. If the sound system isn't excellent, you'll have to rent your own. Listen in on a meeting in progress or test the system yourself.

Cost

What is included vs. ala carte when you rent a room? If it is an overnight event, guaranteeing sleeping rooms may get you a comp meeting room This is also true if you are providing a meal. Other costs to consider are audio/visual, sound system, soft drinks, coffee and materials handling.

Hotel vs. meeting hall

It is always more convenient to use a hotel when people must spend the night. It eliminates the morning drive and hassles for both the speaker and the others who need to be there. The hotel may also be more accommodating with last minute needs.

Promotion Tips

Identify markets

1. Key people in large companies
Go for the big sale. Have them bring the whole office.
2. Encourage out-of-state cooperation
3. Past students
This group is the most likely to take another course. They have had a positive experience and are ready for another.
4. CRS Chapters
They have already committed themselves to advanced education.
5. Large independent companies
It's easier to go after the 'big sale' and get a whole group to go together.
6. Franchises
Same as above.
7. GRI classes and graduates
These people are ready for the next level of training.

Manager Support

Whether you're a Company, a Board or Association, the Branch Manager is the absolute key to attendance. This is the person who must be sold on the event, sold on the speaker and willing to induce the agents to attend. If the manager will stand up in a sales meeting and say, "*This* is a great event, I'm going and I want all of you to go. Please take out your checkbook right now and sign up. I'll come around and pick up your registration forms in a minute", then consider this event a success. If not, then plan on 50%. This is the kind of commitment and closing pressure it takes to get people to attend seminars today. You must be willing to sell the event harder than an agent closes for a listing. *This point cannot be over emphasized.*

Sell tickets at your last event

As mentioned before, this is the best time to promote upcoming events. Actually collect money or signed commitment forms AT the event. If it's too late for this now, remember at THIS event to promote your next one.

Charge for it

Attendance is inversely proportional to what attendees pay for it. If the event doesn't have perceived value, then they have nothing to lose by canceling or not showing up. Even a nominal charge of \$5 or \$10 will increase response. Some companies feel that this should be a perk to their agents and therefore free. There is a lot of merit to this philosophy and for major company events, most valid. For "extra" educational events however, get agreement from your agents that they should share in the costs. Even if you don't charge,

put a price on the seminar. Let them know it's worth attending. When creating the tickets, put a price on them and then "paid for" (or sponsored) by your company.

Add Incentives

1. Charge per head and rebate attendees the same amount or more towards their advertising budget. (This way the money stays in the company.)
2. Charge per head and rebate amount for each potential recruit they bring.
3. Offer a breakfast or lunch included in the price of the seminar.
4. Have a listing contest and the winning office or agent gets recognized at the seminar (with money or a prize).
5. For Mortgage or Title Companies: Print a price on the tickets then give them to your current or potential customers.
6. Have door prizes given away at the end of the seminar (must be present to win).
7. Have a drawing for free advertising \$ (must be present to win).

In-office presentations

If the managers will not, or cannot, make the presentations, then you or your representatives must make the pitch. You must ask a closing question and wait for signed registrations and or checks.

Flyers

A photo of the speaker is essential for a successful promotional piece. Audiences consider speakers celebrities and they want to see what they look like. You'll notice on all promotions for movies, videos, etc. there are pictures of the stars, not just words. People tend to be visual.

Most speakers will provide clients with a 5"x 7" black and white photo for promotions. For about \$15.00 you can take this original to a Quik Print and have a half-tone done to ensure a good reproduction on the flyers.

Elements of a successful flyer are listed below

- Time
- Date
- Place/name of meeting room
- Directions if necessary
- Topic title and description
- Photo of speaker
- Biography of speaker
- Ticket price
- Registration information
- Sponsor(s) name
- Continuing education credits (if applicable)

Posters

Posters can be put up on office bulletin boards so the agents are constantly reminded of the seminar. They should contain the same information as the flyers.

MLS messages

If the seminar is being put on by a Board or Association, put a daily message on the MLS computer reminding agents of the upcoming event. If there are other sponsors involved, make sure and put their name on the messages. This is the kind of exposure they are looking for when they sign on as a sponsor.

Phone calling

Prior to the seminar, launch a phone calling night where office managers or brokers are called and reminded to get their people to attend. Get them to commit to a specific number of people. Preferably call the afternoon or evening before the weekly sales meeting. Tell them you'll call back after the next sales meeting to get their numbers. Make it a fun night with pizza and soda for the callers.

Office visits

For mortgage or title companies, promoting a seminar can be used as a way to get in front of sales people. Arrange with the managers of real estate offices to make presentations at their weekly sales meetings. Take along a video demo tape of the speaker and show it at the meeting. Send around a sign up sheet and get people to feel like they're making a commitment.

Scheduling and Timing

Competing programs

Use your best efforts to see what other programs may be competing against yours. Here is a checklist of sources:

1. State Association
2. Local Board
3. Competing companies
4. National speaker public seminars
5. Holidays
6. Local civic events

Timing

When should I start promoting the seminar? Seminars are scheduled anywhere from one month to 12 months out. The best time to start promoting the seminar is not too early so agents forget, and not too late that they've made other plans. Two months prior to the date can be a good time to start company or association promotions. (If it is an annual state convention you can start promoting 6 months out). The promotions should be distributed at least every other week to keep the interest level going. It doesn't hurt to distribute the same flyer each time, just consider changing the color of the paper. (Studies show that people are most responsive to canary yellow or goldenrod papers).

Allow 2-3 weeks for the creation of the flyers and/or tickets. Two months out would be a good time to start sending out flyers. Have some kind of contact with agents on a weekly or bi-weekly basis regarding the seminar. If you are asking for RSVP's, try to get final numbers two weeks out.

Meeting times and length

We have found over and over again that you will get the best attendance from a real estate group if it's a half-day session in the morning. If it is a three hour seminar, the prime time is 9:00-12:00. Once you get past the 12:00 mark, attendees will start to look at their watches. If you absolutely have to run an afternoon program, the prime time is 1:00-4:00. Too many people have other commitments around the 5:00 hour.

Breaks

The longest recommended stretch before a break is 90 minutes. A three hour program should be broken half way through. A two hour program is right over the edge for needing a break, but to be safe, break at the one hour mark. Keep the break from 10 to 20 minutes.

Fear of breaks: 1) Some event planners fear losing the audience at the break and, 2) some are concerned about the logistics. If you fear losing them at the break, the break isn't the problem, it's the program. Be sure the speaker and the program are strong enough where this isn't a concern. Your audience should want to return to the program after the break. You will lose more of them mentally if they are sitting in pain.

Logistics are of more concern with audiences over 300 people. Too speed things up, have ushers in the hall announce the re-convening. consider using bells, lights or speakers to get attention.

Setting the Stage

The sound system

You must have an excellent sound system. High quality hotels usually have good sound systems, low quality ones don't. Be sure to test it out. For important meetings, consider hiring someone to provide the speakers, amplifier, mixer and microphones. They will set up the equipment and monitor the sound.

Audience control

If you are taking tickets or registering the attendees you need to set up a registration table near the entrance door and make sure they cannot get in through other doors. On a typical seminar morning we've seen 200-500 people all go to the front desk and ask where the event is. Save them this hassle by having signs starting at the entry hall and directing them right to the room.

What room conditions should I be aware of?

Speakers generally prefer a well-lit room. This is not the time for "mood lighting". Make sure all lights are turned up. Watch the temperature. The room should be colder before it is filled, as the body heat will naturally warm it up later. You can really lose people when a room is too warm.

Should I have an on site coordinator?

Yes! One person should be the speaker liaison. This person should be in the seminar room at all times for that inevitable situation that might arise such as microphone problems or light and temperature adjustments.

Who should handle the introduction?

Have a special person selected to introduce the speaker. This person should be a familiar face within the organization, someone that is well respected. Make sure they have received the introduction prior to the seminar and have had time to read it over. Most speakers prefer to have their introductions read to the word with no ad-libbing. Many speakers have lost credibility with an audience due to a bad introduction.

Checklists

Event Promotion Checklist

	Identify Markets
	Past attendees
	Large independent companies: (List them below)
	-
	-
	-
	-
	Franchises: (List them below)
	-
	-
	-
	CRS Chapters
	GRI classes and graduates
	Sponsors
	Mortgage companies
	Title companies
	Cellular phone companies
	Home inspection companies
	Home warranty companies
	Vendors you use frequently
	Advertising specialty companies
	Board of Realtors
	Gift companies
	Home magazine companies
	Tickets
	Flyers
	Posters
	Office visits
	Phone calling
	Announcements at meetings, events. Collect checks
	MLS messages
	Fax messages
	Voice mail reminders

Checklists

Event Budget Planning Worksheet

Expense	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Speaker			
Fee			
Airfare			
Hotel/Meal			
Ground			
Meeting Space			
Refreshments			
Coffee/Tea			
Pastries			
Soft Drinks			
Meal			
Audio/Visual			
Overhead Projector			
Flip Chart			
Screen			
Sound System			
Slide projector			
Video equipment			
Printing			
Outlines/handouts			
Flyers			
Tickets			
Promotion			

Checklists

Elements of a Successful Flyer Checklist

	Date
	Time
	Place/name of meeting room
	Directions if necessary
	Topic title and description
	Photo of speaker(s)
	Ticket price
	Registration information
	Sponsor(s) name
	Continuing education credits (if applicable)

Checklists

On Site Event Checklist

Registration	
	Registration tables
	Signs and arrows directing people to event room
	Attendee list
	Name tags/pens
	Handouts on chairs
Times	
	Start
	Break
	Finish
Room Setup	
	Tables set up for product display
	Chairs set for
	Display tables
	Coffee stations
	Water stations
	Banners, signs, etc.
Stage Setup	
	Front speaker table
	Overhead projector
	Screen
	Flip chart/markers
	Sound system check
	Written speaker introduction
Schedule (Opening comments, introducer, speaker, etc.)	
Time	Speaker, Event, Etc.