



## white space

In the White Space, lofty ideas create innovative actions that lead to distinct success. It is where the science of marketing and visual communication translates into membership growth, improved retention and increased member participation. The best and latest tips and resources related to retaining, communicating with and growing your organization's membership are all right here.

### The Three Most Overused Words

Little, three word statements can get you in trouble. Take "I love you", for instance. Said too soon, too often, not enough, or not at all can sink a relationship. How about every kid's favorite: "Clean your room!" An allowance might be withheld, a cell phone might be held hostage, or, in an extreme case, piles of stuff might be shoveled in the trash can if mom's forceful request is ignored.

Then there are the three word statements that cause you to do the exact opposite of their intention. "Walk, don't run!" is a command that is pretty much impossible for little kids to obey when they're excited. "Nothing new here" and "Pay no attention," on the other hand, immediately piques curiosity. Obviously, you are hiding something and I'd like to know what. Telling Dorothy and her friends to pay no attention to the man behind the curtain didn't work for the Wizard of Oz after Toto unveiled him, and it won't work for you either.

Finally we come to "Save the date," a favorite of event planners. Use that often? If you do, cease, desist, stop immediately! Those are probably the three most overused words in event planning, and using them is the best way to make a bad first impression.

Think about it: you have 3 seconds to make a good first impression. Three! A quick glance is all a person needs to form an opinion. Once that impression has been made, it's nearly impossible to undo. Show up for a first date in a favorite outfit that makes you feel like a million bucks with your hair and makeup just so and a huge smile plastered to your face, and you are already one step towards a second date. Enter the shabby, dreary lobby of what was billed as a boutique hotel, and you might walk right out and seek accommodations elsewhere—and then tell the readers of Yelp, TripAdvisor, and Zagat about it.

Save the date notices that simply list the date and venue are tired, overused, and totally ineffective. They immediately send the message that there's no need to rush, no need to do anything right now, no need to take action because more information is coming...eventually. Your save the date notice is glanced at, tossed, and forgotten. What kind of first impression is your "save the date" notice making for your organization's big event?

Whether you are attempting to make a good first impression in your career or social life, it's very important to know how to create one every time. This article will provide a few useful tips on how to do just that when planning an event. As they like to say, a picture is worth a thousand words. With extra thought and preparation, your picture—or event marketing materials, in this case—could be worth a thousand and one words.





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### THE FIRST IMPRESSION

In this day and age, everything is interactive. To grab someone's attention and leave a really great first impression, you need to wow them, engage them, get them talking. Social media is everywhere these days, and for good reason. With it, you can start a conversation with your audience, whoever and wherever they are. People are not numbers anymore; they're not a boring set of statistics and demographic information laid out in a chart. They're individuals with personalities, and you want to offer them substance, value, excitement and a positive impression of your brand.

Making a good first impression relies on three little rules rather than three little words. When you are planning an event, your marketing materials must:

- 1. Promote the event's value**
- 2. Inspire the unaware**
- 3. Enhance the brand**

### PROMOTE THE EVENT'S VALUE

Use common sense when making that first impression. You need to answer these important questions: Why should I attend your event? What new things will I learn, see, do? What is available to me at this event that I cannot find or get elsewhere? Basically, what's in it for me?

### INSPIRE THE UNAWARE TO ATTEND

Be thought-provoking and inspirational in your messaging, especially during these days when everyone is doing more with less: less time, less people, less money. Make a strong argument for why someone should leave the busy day-to-day of their jobs to go to your event. What will be new, fun, interactive, a once-in-a-blue-moon experience? How was last year's event such a smashing success, and what will make this year's better?

### ENHANCE THE BRAND

Put on your strategy hat and remember that you're not selling an event, you're selling an entire brand experience. Your event adds value to your brand, and you're putting on this event so members will think more highly of your brand. After all, your ultimate goal is to ensure attendees become members, renew their membership, or increase their donation, not because you like to throw a big party.

This is a great quote that I read somewhere, and I am sorry I don't remember where, but it's very apropos to this discussion: "Your event should be a memorable experience that adds value to your brand, but if your first impression is of the same old-same old, then what is that really doing?"





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You need to do something new, so break out of your box, ditch the playbook, and approach your event with fresh eyes. Armen Gharabegian, CEO of Design Ethos in LA, contributed some relevant advice in a column that appeared in Corporate Events Magazine. He really stressed the impact your event has on your brand. We couldn't agree more. If the marketing materials you use before, during, and after the event look the same every year, your organization looks irrelevant, out of touch, stodgy, and boring. But don't just focus on the design and how your brand looks; the content matters even more. Your marketing materials must resonate with people and tell your brand's story.

Gharabegian also urges you to think about the key takeaways of your event: How will you get your attendees to remember the information you are sharing with them? Encircle your attendees in messaging that drives home those points. What emotions do you want to trigger? Go beyond a new look and message in your signage and staging; take it to the flooring, seating, walls, ceiling. Incorporate everything into your branding efforts.

Making a great first impression while planning your event starts with thought, preparation, and relevance. In those three, very fast seconds someone spends glancing at your event marketing materials, pull out all the stops to grab their attention. By adding inspiration, excitement, and value, and your brand will grow and flourish.

