

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.

Get it right this year.

FOCUS ON 4 CRUCIAL AREAS TO INCREASE ATTENDANCE.

AND, NO, WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT LOSING WEIGHT, WRITING THAT NOVEL, OR LEARNING HOW TO "DEAL" WITH YOUR MOTHER-IN-LAW.

Turning to the internet to find information and answer questions has become quite natural for many of us. Why waste valuable energy, brain cells and time when you can just turn to Google for all your questions.

Directions, recipes, dog training tips, how to manage teenagers, what books to read, what clothes to wear, how to fix my hair, ways to save money, ways to spend money. It's all on the internet. Periodically, we take a few moments to scour the internet and see what other people are saying about conference marketing.

Regardless of our Google inquiry, we always come back with the same result: "there's a whole lotta stuff out there!"

Articles, blog posts, surveys, webinars, podcasts, tweets. Very little good, some bad, and mostly ugly. Whenever I overhear one of my kids trying to sweet talk their dear grandmother into spoiling them with something more than usual, I'm remind of a phrase I heard from her many times in my youth, but have yet heard her say to her sweet grandkids.

"You need that like you need another hole in your head."

That phrase comes to mind when reading all the junk in cyberspace on conference marketing. You guys need another boring newsletter like you need another hole in your head. Here are four, just four, and only four areas you need to focus on with conference marketing. Forget all the bad, trivial stuff you've read, and follow these four crucial rules for marketing success in 2010.

DEVELOP AND USE PERSONAS.

If you're looking for one big, new thing to shake up your marketing plan and make it more effective, this is it. (You can thank us later for laying this golden nugget at your feet....or, in your inbox.) Developing and using personas is based on a well-known, and widely-practiced philosophy that some of us may be known to have shouted at retail clerks and customer service reps:

"The customer is always right." For you, we'll tweak it to: "The conference attendee is always right."

Hopefully, you understand that if you don't give conference attendees what they need, they'll find some other way to get it. That's very much what you do when a company isn't providing the service/product you need, right?

Creating a persona allows you (and your communications team) to get into the mind of your members. Developing a persona will transform you into an expert on your members. Not only will you know who they are, what they like, but you'll also learn how to communicate in a way that resonates with them. You'll unlock the secret to inspiring them.



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All of that information can then be used to create a member-centered communications plan. The primary persona is a fictional character that mirrors real conference attendees. It includes creating a name, photo, bio, business objectives and other attributes. You can use the persona to navigate through scenarios conference attendees may encounter before deciding to register for the annual meeting. And the fun doesn't stop here, you then move on to developing a secondary persona.

WHY DO IT?

Developing a persona and using it can have the following causes and effects:

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Understand their communication style.	Potential attendees receive and digest your message.
Understand their decision making process.	Overcome (or prevent) objections for attending.
Pinpoint communications.	Messages stick to targeted members.
Discover their pressure points.	Potential attendees emotionally connect with messaging, making it more compelling.

HOW TO GET STARTED?

1. Realize that conference attendance depends on inspiring members. Duh.
2. Recognize that you are not your members.
In other words, your members might be different than you. (Again, duh.)
3. Research your members.
Learn about your members. I mean, really learn about them - favorite websites, tv shows, what their home life is like, etc. Don't be scared to interact with them, I doubt they bite. Find out what they like, what inspires them, who they are, etc.
4. Develop.
Make the findings of this research understandable and actionable. Develop personas using descriptions, picture and scenarios.
5. Segment marketing communications.
Make member-focused marketing decisions. Plan conference marketing based on primary and secondary personas of potential attendees.



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6. Measure the results.

Be ready to capture the results from this new, more effective way of communicating with your members.

Want more info about developing personas? We've got it. (Click here to learn about "Persona Development")

USE SOCIAL MEDIA, THE CORRECT WAY.

Do you know what's worse than not using social media? Using social media incorrectly. It's way worse, because it's public! People are going to see that you don't know what you are doing. They will either laugh at you, quickly become annoyed with you...or if you are lucky, they'll never notice you. But, if used correctly social media can make you seem hip, informed, accessible and trustworthy as an expert in your industry.

Also, according to Mashable, during December 2009, global users spent an average of five hours on social networking sites, up from three hours in December 2008. That's an 82% increase.

WHY DO IT?

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Learn how to use social media.	Members think you are hip, informed and know they can easily reach out to you.
Increase web presence.	Reach more potential attendees.
Create easy-to-share content.	Followers and fans spread your content with their friends and colleagues.
Two-way communications with potential attendees.	Strengthen relationships and get valuable feedback.

HOW TO GET STARTED:

1. Based on primary persona, decide what content and information conference attendees may want to share with their networks.

Pictures, videos, presentations, handouts, speaker bios, podcasts, etc - are all content that attendees will want to use when sharing their reflections on the event over blogs, Twitter and Facebook.

2. Create a social media strategy and policy.

Your're luck, we've already told you how to do that in some of our recent blog posts. (Creating a Social Media Policy, Developing a Social Media Strategy)



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3. Integrate social media into the live event.

Something as simple as creating a TwitterFountain would be a great tool.

4. Integrate with other communication efforts.

Pull it all together so you don't seem like a schizophrenic marketer. Check out a previous newsletter we wrote about purposefully integrating communication.

5. Show some personality!

Nobody likes a boring tweeter.

VIDEO, VIDEO, AND MORE VIDEO.

From the big screen to the small screen and now to the smart screen, video and motion graphics have become what the people like.

We're not just talking about video's made with your flip camera or with a production studio, we're also talking about motion graphics. Clips with audio, movement and text can dramatically help define the story being told. It brings life to inanimate words and images.

Consumers are overwhelmed with information, news. After a while it becomes too noisy and they can't receive the information. But, motion graphics can change that because video appeals to more senses than just text.

The Nielsen Company reported increases in online video usage during 2009, and the prediction is that 2010 will see greater use of online video. Would you announce the annual conference without using email marketing? No way! Email marketing has become a staple in communications, and video and motion graphics are becoming necessities, as well. Your members are on board with online video, it's time for you to jump on board, too - or, you'll be left at the station. And you know what happens to people left at the station? They are forgotten. Every message sent to potential attendees should have a video, this includes (but does not exclude) save-the-date emails, registration offers, speaker bios and more.

WHY DO IT?

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Videos showing images and/or testimonies of last year's attendees.	Potential attendees see event as fun and exciting, as well as informative.
Include video and motion graphics in communications.	Members will absorb your message.
Inspirational Videos.	Potential attendees remember it, and/or share with others.



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HOW TO GET STARTED:

1. Learn to walk before you run.

Start with something small, like an animation of the conference brand mark.

2. Enhance valuable information with animation.

Animate key findings that highlight the most important part of your message.

3. Testimonials.

Create videos with previous attendees giving testimonials about their experience. Videos should open with animated brand mark (created in step 1), and they should be less than three minutes long.

4. Simply do a screen grab of the video you are using and place it in email with a link back to the site to watch the video.

Ask your web guy to explain.

If content is king, then video is his queen. We've got lots more to come about video and motion graphics. Stay tuned to our blog.

LET'S GET VIRTUAL.

Incorporating virtual events with the real event can make you seem like the coolest cat ever, oh, and it can make your conference more valuable.

Don't freak out, the technology for virtual events has gotten better, easier to use and more affordable. In fact, it's so easy to use and widespread, you'd be hard pressed to find someone who hasn't taken an online class or webinar. Again, don't get left at station - the virtual train is loaded up with your members and about to pull out any second. You best get virtual, and quick!

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HOW TO GET STARTED:

1. **Again, start with baby steps.**

Host a webinar or play a podcast at the live event.

2. **Do an interactive, virtual breakout session.**

Members will love another option for receiving content.

3. **Learn the technology and options for virtual events.**

We'll be sharing more info about virtual events on our blog. Or, as we said at the beginning of this newsletter, just Google it.

If you think our recommendation are wrong, then you can try this (<http://www.gorilla-robot.com/>) at your next event. Or, you can hope that the "job fairy" will save the day.

