

# WHAT'S NEXT IN EVENTS

9 Event Professionals Weigh In

**2011**



READY2SPARK

## WHAT'S NEXT IN EVENTS 2011 FOREWORD BY LARA MCCULLOCH-CARTER

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Last year's [What's Next In Events eBook](#) was focused on how Social Media would impact the Events Industry. And did it ever! There's no doubt that social media provided organizers with new ways to connect with and engage attendees, created new revenue streams and at the same time put strains on already tapped-out budgets and resources, spawned new formats of meetings, conferences and education, and enabled planners to hear what people really thought about their events.

As planners become more entrenched in the tools and the strategies behind using them, many are recognizing a need to take an inward look at their organizations and events to deliver extraordinary experiences.

This year we have organized an amazing panel of 9 experts in their respective fields: Conference Education, Sustainable Events, Tradeshow, Event Engagement, Unconferences, Hybrid Events, Branding & Marketing, Special Events and The Next Generation of Event Professionals who will discuss forward-thinking fundamentals to make event businesses even better in 2011.

What I think you'll find - which happened quite organically as opposed to by design - is that almost everyone has interwoven the themes of connectivity and renewal throughout their perspective.

I hope you enjoy this collaborative effort and invite you to participate in the dialogue using the #eventprofs hashtag on Twitter or commenting on our respective blogs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lara". The signature is written in a dark ink on a light background.

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## CHALLENGES OF PARTICIPATORY CULTURE BY JEFF HURT

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We are witnessing the emergence of a cultural phenomenon that supports widespread participation in the production and distribution of content, information and media. Sociologists call it the new **participatory culture**.

### We Want To Participate

- More than 50% of the population has uploaded and shared content, information or media on the Internet.
- More than two-third of adult users of the internet have created and shared content on the Web.
- More than 57% of adult users of the Internet write, post and share content, information or media on social networks.
- More than one-half of adult Internet users are considered media creators. Media creators are those who created a blog, web page, posted original artwork, photograph, stories or videos or remixed online content into their own new creations.

Contrary to popular stereotypes, these activities are not limited to white suburban males or teenagers. Pew Internet researchers found no significant differences in participation by race-ethnicity.

*Data: Pew Internet & American Life Project, Sept. 2010; Facebook Data 2010; Uselt.Com; Jakob Nielsen*

For many adults, the Internet primarily means the web. For Gen Y, Gen X and Gen Z it means chat, connecting with friends, email, games, movies, social networks, text, video--all of which means they are content producers. Each of these groups is involved in individual expression and community involvement via the Internet. They are today's new participatory networked citizens.

### The Participatory Culture Impacts Conferences And Events

In the participatory culture, every person deserves the chance to express him- or herself through words, sounds and images. Not every person must contribute but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready. And that what they contribute will be appropriately valued.

The participatory culture is impacting traditional conferences and events. People want to participate. They are looking for ways to get involved in all aspects of the conference or event from the planning stages to active engagement onsite to post-event participation. Traditional conference strategies of attendees sitting passively, listening to a talking head is out. Seeing conference attendees as participants, co-creators, experts and advocates is in.

Research from MIT, Duke University and the University of California illustrates that the participatory culture has also impacted learning. Technology has not created this shift. The ability for people to engage in shared and interactive learning that is built within the structure, organization and model of the Internet has created this societal change.

## CHALLENGES OF PARTICIPATORY CULTURE (CONT)

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### Six Principles For Today's Conference Education

Here are six principles for designing education sessions for today's conferences based on the research from MIT, Duke University and the University of California.

- 1. Conference education should transition from passive listening to participatory learning.** It relies on collaborative practices. Small group discussion, peer learning, person to person interaction, not just listening to talking heads is important. Some savvy organizers transition from monologues and dialogues to polylogues allowing many people to have several conversations with several others at the same time. (Think face-to-face integrated with online chats.)
- 2. Conference education must transition from presumed authority to collective credibility.** Reliance on the knowledge authorities or certified experts is no longer acceptable amid the growing complexities of experienced professionals. Experts may not have experience implementing their advice. Also, the knowledge gap between the presenter and attendee has shrunk. Sometimes attendees know more than presenters. Conference education needs to move to democratic, communal type formats with affirmation of social equality and that everyone's experience counts.
- 3. Conference education must transition from vertical, authoritative to horizontal structures.** The corporate world is emphasizing collaborative, teamwork, multitasking and problem solving. Standardized, one size-education presentations don't address current corporate world's needs. Focus is on peer to peer sharing and dissecting of presenters' main points.
- 4. Conference education should provide a variety of formal and informal learning opportunities.** Adult education has moved from push, broadcast of information to pull methods. Industry novices do better with traditional conference formats of spoon-feeding information. Industry veterans prefer self-directed, collaborative, reflective education methods. Providing informal seating in pre-convene areas where adults can engage in peer sharing and learning is one way to meet both novice and veteran needs.
- 5. Conference education should transition to networked learning.** Learning is social. It is about mobilizing networks and enabling them to meet others who can help them meet their needs. It emphasizes flexibility and outcomes and less facts and figures, which can change fast. It's about conversations and partnering with others.
- 6. Conference education should be interactive and without walls.** Information is best shared with everyone and not just those within the conference walls. It's about moving information from many that are present to the multitudes that are not present. "We serve our members best when we serve our industry first," is a slogan many will adopt as the provide content and messages to the masses outside of the conference four walls.

Ultimately, the participatory culture shifts the focus from individual passive listening to community involvement. We are moving away from a world in which some produce and others consume towards one in which everyone has an active stake. This means conference and event organizers must begin to think about engaging participants in all aspects of the conference. After all, empowerment is connected at the hip with engagement.

## THE IMPERATIVE OF SUSTAINABLE ACTION BY PAUL SALINGER

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At the start of 2011, the event industry (I'm primarily referencing large conferences and trade shows, but this can also include any type of meeting or event) is currently the **2<sup>nd</sup> largest generator of waste**, only behind the construction industry.

Now that statistic just refers to waste, as in things that go in the garbage or landfill. If you look at the overall impact that events create on the environment, and the communities that host them, then we also need to look at the multitude of resources that we consume, generate and/or waste – things like water, energy, paper, food and a host of other materials. Not to mention the carbon created by the travel for all of our attendees and event staff as we fly to the many events we either attend or put on.

I've perused various blogs and event prognostications for 2011 and green or sustainable events seem to be on pretty much every list. This is a good thing, but it also raises some pretty poignant questions for me:

- Are we really serious about changing our behavior, and driving behavioral change in our attendees to make sustainability a core value and a core practice in event planning?
- Do we understand the impacts that our event decisions have, both environmentally as well as socially?

- Are we willing to make the necessary economic tradeoffs to be considered a sustainable industry, and not a wasteful one?

Certainly, the global financial crisis has hindered progress of Environmental Education & Implementation over the last two years. And although some progress has been made, there still remains limited consensus and definitions of success across the industry. This needs to change.

I am the President-Elect of the [Green Meetings Industry Council](#). The GMIC believes that we need a transformation of the events industry to drive towards sustainable practices which incorporate considerations throughout all stages of a meeting in order to minimize the negative impact on the environment.

By 2020, GMIC envisions a transformed meeting and event industry, driving towards sustainability which:

- Achieves strategic goals that serve the economic, environmental, and social interests of all stakeholders.
- Incorporates the principles of sustainability as standard operating practice
- Integrates international sustainability standards into its management, organization and reporting
- Impacts positively on the local and global society through diversity and inclusivity
- Promotes health, wellbeing, creativity and business effectiveness

## THE IMPERATIVE OF SUSTAINABLE ACTION (CONT)

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We all need to come together to make this vision come to life. The challenge is that when I talk to event planners and suppliers I continue to hear a lot of objections why greening events is not an option for them. Two of the most common issues are:

**I don't know how to get started.** It starts with a plan that incorporates strategic goals for sustainability, key performance indicators (what you want to achieve and measure) and a clear understanding of how you will monitor that process against your business objectives.. There are [international standards](#) that have been developed to help guide you through this part of running a sustainable event.

The BS8901 Standard is a British Standard that is now undergoing peer review and will shortly become an international standard under the ISO process. While this process may not be necessary to run a sustainable event, it offers a lot of wisdom for those who are serious about getting beyond “lazy environmentalism” (doing the bare minimum) to transform their event planning process towards true sustainability.

At a minimum, you might want to familiarize yourself with the [APEX standards](#) that have been developed through the Convention Industry Council (of which GMIC is a part and has played a major role in the development of these standards).

These standards form the basis of looking at the nine main sectors of most large events (and can be adapted for smaller events) – 1) Destination, 2) Venue, 3) Accommodations, 4) Food & Beverage, 5) Transportation, 6) AV

Production, 7) Exhibit Production, 8) Marketing Communications and 9) Onsite Office.

**I can't afford to do green meetings.** Really? My question is, can you afford not to do them? As resources get scarcer, being sustainable in things like paper reduction, energy efficiency, waste reduction through re-use and recycling can actually save you money? That has certainly been my experience. Over the last 4 years at Oracle OpenWorld, a conference of 40,000 attendees (so, a [big](#) impact), we have verified savings of over \$800,000 USD as a result of our sustainability initiatives. Here's our [2010 Report for the Conference](#) if you want to learn more.

Sure, you might find that some sustainable practices are more expensive than their non-sustainable counterparts, but as part of a larger process they will likely balance out or even lower your overall costs.

There is much, much more that can and has been written about this topic. I encourage you to seek out that information through the Green Meetings Industry Council or any number of event companies that are now doing green meetings as a standard way of operating.

What is clear is that to get to a point in our industry where sustainable meetings are simply the way we operate, we need to take collective action and collective responsibility. **The time to start is now.**

## THINKING DANGEROUSLY IN TRADESHOWS BY MICHELLE BRUNO

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**2011 will be the year of thinking dangerously in the trade show business.** After more than two years of layoffs, stagnancy, and bad press, exhibition organizers will finally begin to see the possibilities again. The opportunity to risk, experiment, and change will emerge and nimble, forward-thinking organizations will finally be able to move forward on the ideas and intuitions that were percolating over the long winter of the recession.

Entrepreneurs will be the first to benefit:

- Those who immediately differentiate themselves with new products, value propositions, and modes of execution will draw the most attention.
- Reverse trade shows, hybrid exhibitions, and group “experiences” will flourish.
- Finely tuned niche shows will be the most popular as the new year ushers in a return to smaller more intimate buying environments (more like the Apple Store instead of Macworld).
- Social trade shows will emerge as the by-product of the social networking frenzy facilitated by Facebook and other public platforms. Although the trade show industry has been slower than

others to adopt and integrate social strategies, in 2011, an influx of socially savvy attendees and exhibitors will demand that shows accommodate the tweeting, posting, linking, sharing, texting, checking-in and gaming that goes on outside the trade show.

The globalization that had been stalled by the recession and government concerns over terrorism (marked by difficulty in getting visas for foreign visitors) will return in 2011. At a time when the U.S. market is no longer large enough to fuel growth in some trade shows, the emerging markets of Brazil, India, and China will pump out exhibitors and buyers interested in U.S. shows and American innovation. Organizers will renew their international marketing strategies and make the necessary accommodations for foreign visitors at their shows.

Frugality will be chic in 2011. With so many layoffs, mergers, and companies out of business, the over-the-top gala will be a thing of the past—and not just because shows can no longer afford it. Organizations that come across as conservative and green will attract the most attention and appreciation from attendees—especially those that translate the savings into services for their customers.

Collaboration will be king. In 2011, collaborative platforms, crowdsourcing, and networked problem solving will enter the trade show lexicon thanks to the community-building efforts of some progressive show organizers. Providing input, feedback, and ideas on how to improve the event will no longer be the domain of the exhibitor advisory committee—all stakeholders will be able to chime in whether the organizer likes it or not.



## THINKING DANGEROUSLY IN TRADESHOWS (CONT)

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Trade shows will be more fun next year. With the virtual, social, and mobile waves in full swing, organizers and exhibitors will look to all three technologies to embed games into the exhibition experience. Since trade shows are all about engagement, there is no better way to engage participants than to challenge them to a trivia contest or a word scramble. The intended consequences of such play will be increased learning about exhibitors' products and a more memorable experience for attendees.

Thinking dangerously is not quite the same as living dangerously, but for trade show organizers, it's a start. 2011 may be more of an end than it is a beginning. The first group to throw off the shackles of the last two years, open up the hatches (instead of battening them down) and think, think, think about the possibilities will be poised for success even if it doesn't come with growth at first. Who's in?

## THE NEW RULES OF ENGAGEMENT BY JESSICA LEVIN

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### **New Decade, New Rules of Engagement**

The year 2010 marked the beginning of a new decade as well as the start of a new and different landscape for events and their planners. The use of social media was still fairly new to most planners in the beginning of 2010, but that changed incrementally over the twelve months that followed. As the year progressed, the hottest topics for workshops, webinars and conference

sessions involved introductions to new forms of social media and how to use them. Planners were updated on the rules of engagement - new tools that were available to them and how to utilize them. In this context, the term “engagement” means fostering interaction between attendees, sponsors and speakers before, during and after events. Planners quickly learned that engagement through social media enabled them not only to engage with participants but to create a buzz and increase everyone’s excitement about attending.

One of the commonly used and widely accepted means of engaging participants was through the use of Twitter. Through something as simple as a hashtag, participants began interacting long before the event even began. Pre-event educational sessions were held during which participants were able to share knowledge bytes and comment on the subject matter

which created peer interaction, even for those who were not able to attend a particular conference in person.

As planners became more facile with tools available to them, online communities were created for events, increasing the level of connection among attendees, speakers and sponsors. Many organizations used services like Pathable, Crowdvine or the Social Collective to host their online communities and to help to nurture the online relationships. An increasing number of online communities will likely crop up in 2011, particularly in the Association arena. Online communities will be adopted by Associations not only for specific events but throughout the calendar year, enabling their members to connect with each other on a regular basis.

A learning curve regarding how to properly implement and execute social media, of course, still exists for many organizations; they are still not quite up to speed on how best to use social tools to enhance the level of participant interaction. To remedy the situation, there will be a trend towards more planner-focused education extending beyond the basics of social media. While 2010 was the year of introduction of tools, 2011 will be the year when they are more fully integrated and mastery of them becomes the new normal.

### **It’s Not Just Technology**

Engagement, of course, is limited to technology based tools; it touches upon every touch point an event organizer has with participants at every level including, but not limited to:

## THE NEW RULES OF ENGAGEMENT (CONT)

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- Educational design;
- Room set-up;
- Speaker selection process;
- Event promotion;
- Networking; and
- Online communication

Planners will also need to hone in on how to properly conduct a hybrid event involving face-to-face and remote participants to ascertain that everyone is equally engaged. Hybrid events are not appropriate for everyone; planners that use them will face the special challenge of how to merge both groups of attendees as seamlessly as possible.

### One Size Does Not Fit All

There is no single social technology system that is right for all planners. Since planners are still in the early stages of fully understanding how social technology and engagement can be integrated into their individual strategic plans, one size does not fit all. What is applicable to all, however, is that combining creativity with strategic technology is a powerful method for achieving their goals. Planners will likely become increasingly aware that the tools are far less important than the way they are utilized; they will also become more comfortable with the level of nurturing essential to engagement and begin to build strategies that will enhance activities that increase such nurturing.

### Late Adopters

Despite all that is available in terms of social media, some organizations are simply late adopters. If your industry has yet to embrace and integrate social technology, don't be discouraged; you are not alone. Industry organizations and informal networking groups are ubiquitous and will provide systems of education and support to you to keep you informed of current and existing systems and methodologies. Planners and organizations that already understand the impact of social technology will, of course, have the advantage of being able to take event engagement to the next level, but late adopters will have a chance to catch up. In addition, many of the early "glitches" will already have been worked out, so there are some advantages to being a little behind the curve.

### The Value Proposition for Associations

Associations are continually seeking ways to enhance the value of their membership, and tools such as online communities that connect members will add immediate value. These types of communities will allow members to get to know each other in a more in-depth fashion which will provide additional learning and networking opportunities. The responsibility of educating members on how to utilize available tools is, of course, to be addressed by the management of the particular association.

### Corporate Events

Corporate events might not have formal online communities, however, attendees will begin to become accustomed to – and therefore expect –

## THE NEW RULES OF ENGAGEMENT BY JESSICA LEVIN

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higher levels of interaction. This will touch upon everyone involved with a particular event; one clear example of this is that sponsors will begin to demand better access to their “target” attendees. One advantage of social technology is that it will enable sponsors to connect with attendees far more unobtrusively than before; planners and sponsors will increasingly work together to develop creative means to adding value to the sponsorships while educating their target markets.

### Summary

2011 promises a progressive landscape for events. Organizations are still getting up to speed on how to adopt social technology for events and general communication; however it will no longer appear to be out of the norm. The marketplace will begin to expect unique and interactive experiences and organizations will be able to deliver such experiences to attract attendees. Some planners still face resistance from “the powers that be” in their particular organization on integrating tools, acceptance will gradually increase. A natural by-product of that acceptance will be that organizations will begin to look for a return on their investment into the social media arena; planners will be responsible for creating metric and measuring results. The coming year will move the focus on strategy, measurement, engagement and overall acceptance of new and improved ways to conduct events, for the benefit of all participants.

## DEMYSTIFYING THE UNCONFERENCE BY ADRIAN SEGAR

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Nine hundred years ago, when the world's first universities were being founded and prestigious libraries might contain a few hundred hand-copied books, the way you learned something was to travel to where a man (in those days it was always a man) knew it, and sit and listen to him teach it to you.

This model for learning sank deep into our culture. Today, on a computer we can hold in our hands, we can search the internet for information or watch videos of the finest presenters. Yet, even

though we have amazing content at our fingertips, our meeting designs have not changed much from the classroom model required by the technologies available during the Middle Ages.

Over the last twenty years, new face-to-face meeting designs—such as [Open Space](#), [World Café](#), [Conferences That Work](#), [Future Search](#), and [Everyday Democracy](#)—have appeared that challenge the entrenched dominant learning paradigm of passive reception of predetermined information. Although each design has unique features and goals, what they all have in common is that what happens at the event is participant-driven, rather than being largely prescribed by the conference organizers. Collectively, these formats are known as unconferences.

Here are some of the key features of an unconference:

- Unconferences can be designed to work on a group problem or goal, or as a time for individualized learning and sharing. Longer events can also include traditional sessions, keynotes, etc.
- Meaningful and useful interaction between attendees is put center stage, instead of being something that happens in the breaks between sessions.
- The culture is designed to be participatory, not passive. This has a highly positive effect on the environment, outcomes, and community created at the event.
- Learning happens in small groups, rather than in large general sessions.
- Teaching and learning aren't fixed roles; a teacher at one moment may be a learner the next.
- The experience and expertise of the participants is harnessed, rather than relying on the contributions of a few outside experts.
- Participants have more input into and control over their learning and takeaways from an unconference, and thus are more likely to satisfy the goals for the event.
- Interesting, unexpected things are likely to happen. While traditional conferences discourage risky learning, unconferences create an environment where sessions can be created on the spot, questions are welcomed, and sharing is encouraged.

## DEMYSTIFYING THE UNCONFERENCE (CONT)

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It's no coincidence that unconference designs were developed as our society responded to the increased availability of information and ease of sharing made possible by the personal computer and the internet. And yet, despite the pervasive reality of ubiquitous knowledge and connectivity, these new designs are still rarely used by professional event planners.

One reason is the fear that an unconference just won't work. I've run unconfereces for twenty years, and reviewed thousands of evaluations, and I can assure you that the level of satisfaction with unconference formats is much higher than traditional events. (One of the reasons for this is that I've found that traditional program committees predict less than half the sessions that attendees actually want). Other reasons include the misconception that crowdsourcing session topics before an event makes it an unconference, the understandable fear of giving up control over one's event, and general unfamiliarity with unconference revenue models, facilitation requirements, and logistical considerations.

All these barriers to the implementation of unconference meeting designs are readily overcome with education and experience. Most event planners (and their clients) have begun to hear the rumbles of dissatisfaction from attendees who are no longer satisfied flying hundreds of miles to listen to speakers they could have watched on YouTube, or to attend a conference where a majority of the sessions are not what they really wanted. Instead, these attendees are increasingly demanding meetings that concentrate on what only face-to-face events can provide—like Howard Givner's experience of a recent unconference:

“...one of the most innovative and eye-opening professional experiences I've had. Aside from coming back with lots of new tips and ideas, I easily established triple the number of new contacts, and formed stronger relationships with them, than at any other conference I've been to.”

We know how to create these events. Our clients are starting to ask for them. So, if you haven't already, attend an unconference in 2011 and experience a participant-driven event firsthand. Or talk to people who have. Then you'll be ready to begin to build unconference designs into your event planning future.

## THE NEW HYBRID FRONTIER BY MICHAEL MCCURRY

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With the arrival of the New Year, meetings and events professionals are optimistic about the future of their businesses. Events industry analysts are collectively predicting a noticeable improvement, in the economy, for 2011. They expect even better in 2012. That is certainly encouraging!

Realistically, for now, the economy is still in “recovery mode.” As was the case in 2009 and 2010, many businesses are exercising caution with their finances. Subsequently business travel and education expense are still under a watchful eye.

With reduced budgets employees are, in some cases, competing with one another for company funds, making it nearly impossible for everyone that should attend conferences, and events, to do so. Those fortunate enough to get their travel expenses approved must work hard to convince management there will be a viable return on their travel investment.

Even with improved economic conditions, there remains an education void for many event professionals, with fewer travel dollars to spend. So, how do we fix this problem?

### Hybrid Events May Be the Best Solution for Your Event in 2011

In late 2009/ early 2010 hybrid events emerged as an affordable, viable alternative event solution of interest for many meeting organizers. For context, a hybrid event is one in which organizers provide customers (potential attendees) the option of remote access to all, or a portion of the conference content, utilizing some or several forms of social technology.

In 2010 several major meetings industry associations (i.e. PCMA, MPI) successfully introduced Hybrid components into their events. In fact these organizations are now featuring education sessions, at their 2011 conferences, to teach attendees about the advantages and “best practices” for use of hybrid technology.

Over the past couple of years I have participated in numerous hybrid events, either as a remote attendee, or as an organizer. On both sides of the ball I have learned a remote participant experience does not replace its face2face counterpart. However, if executed properly, in the right context, a hybrid event can serve a very functional purpose.

### The Litmus Test – Why Create a Hybrid Event?

If you are wondering whether a hybrid event makes sense for your organization, then ask yourself the following questions:

- Are there customers or prospects that will most likely not be able to attend your organization’s conference due to their own financial, geographic or scheduling constraints?

## THE NEW HYBRID FRONTIER (CONT)

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- Are there potential customers you could reach, through online access, that otherwise would not be accessible?
- Are you interested in exceeding your customer's expectations, by offering them conference access options that meet their needs, in a difficult economy?

If your answer is yes to any of these questions, then you need to strongly consider introducing hybrid components to your 2011 event.

The Hybrid events world is the new frontier of the conference business. Since the technology and processes are so new, there are not a lot of rules, and only a handful of best practices to follow, as of yet. However, the quality of these events is accelerating. It is fair to say new enhancements will bubble to the surface in 2011.

In a shaky economy, and with many quality online education alternatives available to business people, organizations can no longer rely upon their past successes with traditional conference design to attract attendees. In this social technology era, folks have more online options available to them than ever, to address their education goals.

Organizations can certainly choose to ignore these competing online education channels, at their own peril. A smarter approach may be to jump on the hybrid event "bandwagon" meeting the competition head-on.

There may be an opportunity for your organization to strengthen its relationships with customers by offering them innovative hybrid conference solutions that will meet their unique needs during this economic recovery.

The payoff, for your thoughtful approach will be their extended loyalty towards your conference and organization far into the future.



## A BRAND NEW WORLD BY LARA MCCULLOCH

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We have not only heralded a New Year, but are in the process of embarking on a Brand New World.

Social media has redefined the realm of branding. Your brand is no longer defined by who you tell people you are but is defined by the sum of all of their experiences with you.

Real, authentic experiences, not pomp and pageantry, now drive perception. In this Brand New World...

### **You will have to look great buck naked**

For all of its ails and controversy, what Wikileaks should have taught us is that gone are the days when he who had the deepest pockets was assured to rule the roost. We now live in a time when employees, customers, competitors and anyone else with a vested interest can expose our deepest and darkest secrets.

If you can't stand up in front of a full length mirror, peel away the 'messaging', 'advertising' and 'PR', and feel damn amazing about what you see, it's only a matter of time until your true self is exposed or you learn that you're just not interesting enough to talk about.

Businesses with big ideas, vivid value, agility, a desire to experiment, the courage to fail at some things but say they tried, the broad-mindedness to involve the crowd, passion, vision and big personality; those who treat their employees well, delight their customers and create buzz-worthy experiences will thrive.

### **You will have to shift from marketing team to marketing culture**

I began by saying that Branding is ultimately based on the sum of all experiences people have with you. From billing practices to operations to delivery to quality of product, every single one of these activities (and many more) contribute to your reputation.

Marketing has traditionally been the independent team who stewarded the brand. In this new world, even this is changing. As someone so poignantly pointed out to me one day, "**Everyone** within your organization is now in marketing".

That means a shift in thinking for most businesses. A shift in who is responsible for external communications. A shift in required skills. A shift in training. A shift in how departments cross-pollinate with one another. A shift in organizational structure.

### **You will have to embrace your detractors**

As the use of social media continues to rise, so too will opinionated consumers. Sharing an opinion online with hopes of warning or influencing

## A BRAND NEW WORLD (CONT)

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others will become second nature for more and more people...including your attendees and customers.

Every businesses needs to rid themselves of the nail-biting terror that someone may disagree with them or post a negative review. Odds are, if it hasn't happened already, it probably will in the future. And that tweet, comment, blog post, status update or review will likely influence other people. But you have an opportunity to make some lemonade.

Embrace your detractors. Acknowledge their opinions and respond accordingly. Recognize that the way you choose to respond is sometimes more powerful than the original complaint.

### **You will require social proof**

All businesses need to be proactively seeking, collecting and promoting [social proof](#) of their products or services. More and more customers are turning to Google, Forums, Quora, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and the multitude of other social tools available to answer their questions about brands, events and purchase decisions. And they [trust](#) the opinions of others (yes, even strangers).

If you don't have people talking about you and you haven't captured online testimonials, you will be as good as non-existent to inquiring minds.

### **You will need to understand influencers**

Influence is often misunderstood. It's different from popularity. Whereas popularity is defined by the number of people within your network, influence is your position within it. It's your capacity to effect the behavior or actions of others.

Many businesses are understanding how influence and the people who hold it can impact the success of a brand (see [Virgin](#) & [The Palms Hotel](#)). 2011 will likely see more effective tools that calculate online influence and more companies building partnerships with passionate influencers.

Successfully engaging influencers will be less about pitching someone to relay your message and more about finding strategic partnerships that, like any great partnership, create value for both parties.

### **You will need an on-the-go experience**

It's [projected](#) that the number of mobile internet users will outnumber desktop internet users by 2015. Go to any event today and you'll see people talking, taking pictures, updating their social sites and texting from their cell phones. The problem is that many are doing so on their own accord. Mobile Event Apps will be massive in 2011 because they will help planners to build a connected & valuable on-site experience for guests.

### **Are you ready to thrive in this Brand New World?**

## SPECIAL ENGAGEMENTS BY RYAN HANSON

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The most critical success factor for the future of Special Events is the audience. Of course guests are important; we have known that for years. You want them to have fun and enjoy themselves. No. That is not the reason. The audience is the most important factor in the success of the Special Event because it is the audience who will make the event successful and transformative over time, through their own actions, behaviors, or change of behaviors, and ability to find

engagement through the having, sharing of or being at the event experience.

The tradition of the Special Event is to “Wow them”. Which has meant to surprise a passive audience through music, magic, or maybe smoke and mirrors. It has meant to decorate space. To cover up the somewhat ordinary for a short period of time and to make it pretty and therefore “Special.” But this sort of decorated reality lacks intention and though many may “ooh” and “ahh” on cue at any given moment, the reaction fades quickly into the background and is all but forgotten in a day or two, if it was remembered at all.

We must replace “Wow” with “Why” if we long to grow into an industry that is continually contributing to the creation of value. Why are we

holding this event? What do we want to achieve? But the question of why is not only left to the client or the planner. Often overlooked, and now more true than ever, even if it is only because the question has moved from the unconscious to the conscious – the event guest is questioning Why – Why should I go? Why should I expend resources on this gathering – my time or my money? What is the value proposition being offered to me?

The story of the last half-decade is the rise of the voice of the individual. Well it is a fair debate as to whether anyone is listening, it cannot be argued that the boom in technology has only advanced the ability of those with access to say something, say anything. Through platforms of voice, individuals are able to share their thoughts, feelings, likes and dislikes with the world in real time. The individual has become empowered to stake a claim and be heard by more people that could hear one person at any point in history – those listeners able to then agree or disagree, like and follow or dissent with their own remarks. We are limitlessly tribal, to steal from Mr. Godin, being given voice, anyone can start a tribe and find those who wish to belong, as well as belong to as many tribes as you wish. Just “Like” them on Facebook.

What this means for meetings and events should be obvious. If every other part of the world is telling you to have an opinion, share your voice and speak up to be heard about – why wouldn’t you, with the best of intentions, want to speak up, be heard, and say something about/at/for/with/to the group of people gathered for your event. When the world says you don’t have to listen to the message being shouted from the big brand, that instead you are able to craft your own message, be a part of that

## SPECIAL ENGAGEMENTS (CONT)

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conversation and talk back, why wouldn't you expect to be able to do the same at the next company sales meeting or Special Event. After all the very definition of an event is a gathering of people for some purpose. So why do we keep thinking about events as logistical to-dos with checklists to be completed and lists of details to manage. We need to change the terms; stop with the parties and start throwing conversations.

To build successful events in the 2010s, brands and organizations have to stop talking - the "event" is not the new 'living' billboard, meaning 'Visit me and let me shout my message AT you' – but rather build space in which their friends and their foes may engage with them in discourse, through play, through participation, through action. That space may live in the virtual world, or in the real world or more probably in both. That is not at all to say you don't have a hand in guiding the conversation – absolutely the idea to get the audience discussing the message you want them to talk about and not talking about what you don't. The point is that when we are creating events, we are dialoguing a discourse - two-sided discussions in which the audience is a key voice.

So let them have their voice. Engage your audience, not just by polling them or having a twitter wall. Give them ownership in the creating the experience they want to have. Why not crowdsource your attendees to find out what they want; let them have their say in the food, the fun, the talent or destination. Schedule time not just for your expert to profess his profound thoughts, but for the audience to dialogue with each other on that point of view, ask rigorous questions and even change the topic if that is what they want to talk about.

But it is not enough to simply give voice to the audience. Our challenge, as event professionals is greater. Our task is to build value for that audience, to create unique experiences in which every individual finds merit and purpose. If we believe meetings and events are capable of motivating action, creating behavioral change, or generating buzz and belief in a brand, than we must also believe that if the audience doesn't find value in their experience, the event fails at doing any of the above, or it succeeds at doing any of the above negatively. In the words of my colleagues, Cheryl Kranz, we are tasked with creating "5,000 events for 5,000 people." That is to say, in the experiences we create we must provide enough opportunities and employ a robust mix of engagement strategies to allow each individual attendee find their own sense of value within the experience. Rather than shooting for an 80% positive rating on the evaluation, why don't we shoot for 100% success, by allowing our guests to own their experience and by asking the question differently: Did you find value in the experience? Was the event worth your time? How has your <blank> (life, perception, outlook, motivation, desire, assumptions, beliefs) changed as a result of this experience? Was the celebration worth it?

**And when each, empowered, individual voice chimes in unison 'Yes!', well we will have done our job.**

## STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE BY CAROLYN RAY

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As we move into 2011 and the economy slowly returns to its pre-slump state, we are beginning to see an upswing in the event industry. Already a multibillion-dollar global market, the event industry is expected to see a 16% growth in job opportunities for meeting and convention planners before 2018<sup>1</sup>. This increase doesn't even begin to factor in non-profit event specialists, venue managers, wedding planners, florists, caterers and all of the other individuals that are integral to making our events a success. In other words, get ready to see a new generation of event professionals eager to unleash their

“experience” on the world.

Now don't get me wrong, I love that there are new faces in the industry. It is so wonderful to see people with fresh ideas and an unbridled passion for events. Our industry is exciting and ever changing and the only way for us to continue to grow is by regularly inviting people to join and actively participate in our community. That said, there is one major caveat: as an “emerging profession” there are few, if any, barriers to entry in the event industry and moreover, there are no stringent requirements to practice as an event professional. As a result, the industry continues to find itself

inundated with individuals who consider themselves to be “professionals” simply because they once had the opportunity to plan a birthday party or help plan their sister's wedding.

Yes, I agree that everybody needs to start somewhere and that some people have an innate talent for producing amazing events but that is not what worries me. Much like building a new home, an event must be carefully engineered to meet both the client's specifications and outside rules and regulations. Without the proper foundation, an event has the potential to be a disaster. We must have some faith that the event engineer is adhering to a level of professional standardization that has not yet been fully embraced by the event community. The concern here is that many people do not seek out adequate education before jumping headfirst into the field. In fact, a recent study showed that 33.3% of event planners claimed to have had absolutely no event education whatsoever<sup>2</sup>. In such a detail laden and continually evolving profession where education opportunities exist around every corner it is imperative that new planners take control of their careers and maximize their knowledge. I am not just talking about the basics, I am talking about learning why things are done the way they are and truly understanding the theory behind each and every move.

By developing an understanding of why things are the way they are and why industry professionals choose to do things in a specific way the quality of events will improve dramatically. When planners adhere to industry-wide standards a level of confusion is eliminated and a level of communication is

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<sup>1</sup> U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics

<sup>2</sup> Ray, C. S. (2010). Making dreams a reality: An insight into event management and conceptualization. (Unpublished Master's Thesis) University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

## STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE (CONT)

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elevated. Precise measures that are recognized and accepted can help to cut out the guesswork and errors that come from unclear communication. Developing and adhering to industry standardization is not about sapping creativity, it is not about creating molds that cannot be broken but rather it is about developing standards to strive for in an attempt to smooth out the event planning process.

This past summer, the Canadian Tourism Human Resources Council (CTHRC) in conjunction with several international contributors released the, long awaited, International Event Management Competency Standards. As 2011 matures, we are sure to see an increased interest in these standards and perhaps even some early adoption. Within the next four to five years, as event management programs incorporate these standards into their curricula we will likely see an increase in their industry integration. Let's not be afraid of these standards. Let us accept and embrace them as a means of bettering our community. As planners, it is our job to ask the questions that other people don't think of and to eliminate uncertainty. By seeking out knowledge and standards we instill confidence in ourselves, our colleagues and most importantly, our clients.

In addition, the January launch of the Event Leadership Institute\* seeks to provide "progressive education, training and insights by and for event professionals." By accessing content and sharing knowledge the possibilities are endless. In an industry that is constantly evolving it is imperative that we keep up with the times and consistently expand our knowledge base. Together we have the potential to further contribute to initiatives like the Event Management Body of Knowledge (EMBOK), the Convention Industry Council's Accepted Practices Exchange (APEX) and the education of future

event planners. The more that we, as event professionals, come together to learn and discuss the better positioned we are to maximize the industry's potential.

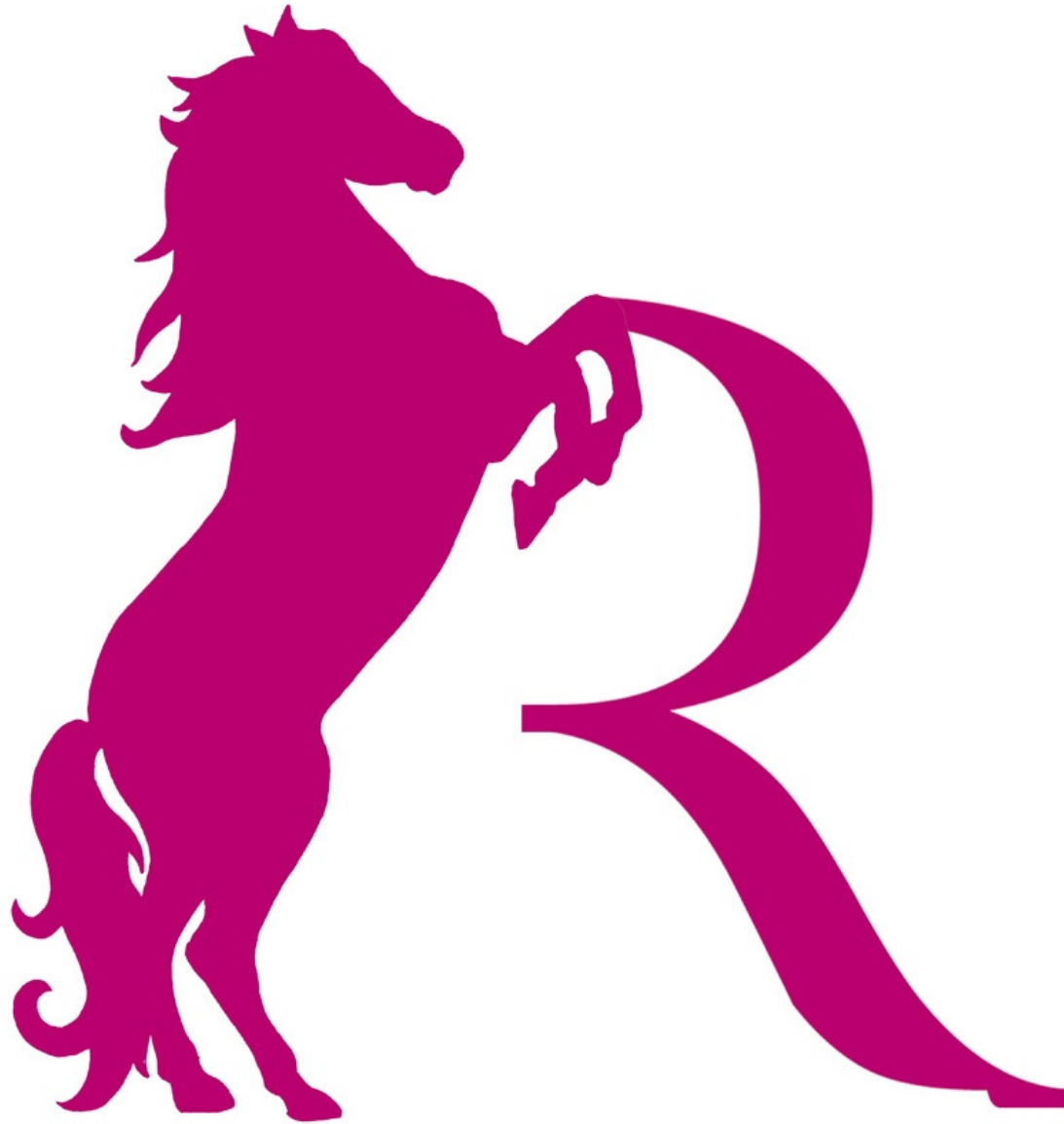
So what can you do? Get out and learn! Check out the field of event studies. Attend seminars, find a mentor, volunteer in an area that you might not know about and please, check out industry standards like APEX, EMBOK and the International Event Management Competency Standards. It is our goal as event professionals to make the industry better and our biggest opportunity to do this is to help increase awareness of standards and encourage new and veteran planners alike to commit to professional excellence.

\* Full Disclosure: Carolyn Ray serves as the Education Director for the Event Leadership Institute

## USING THIS CONTENT

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