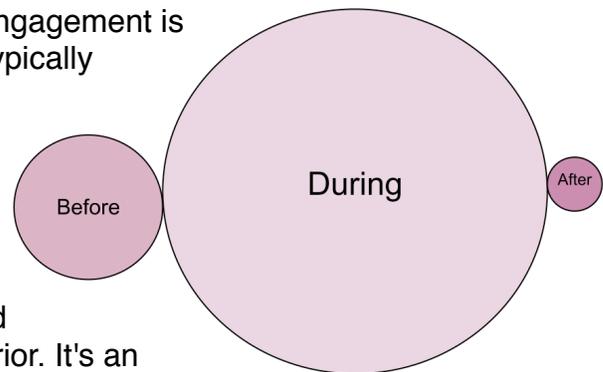


Audience engagement strategies for meeting planners

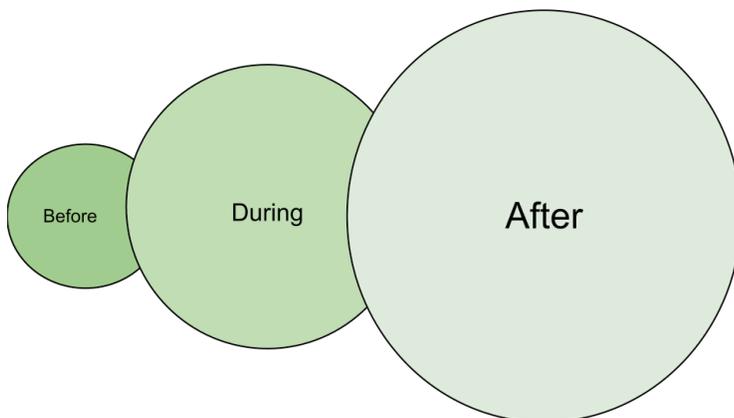
By Kristi Casey Sanders, with assistance from Danielle Adams, Vickie Corder, Juli Heineman, Lacey Mitchell, Vicki Sumagpang, Nicole Taylor, Cindy Tilton, Vickey Woodley, Kathleen Zwart, CMP, Jackie Franklin, Gina Hengst, Wayne Bolai, Sandra Rose, Julie Rhea Bell, Sabrina Young, Holly Laverentz, Matt Gingras and Julie Fisher

The traditional model of event marketing and engagement is broken. This is pattern of communication that typically happens pre-, during and post-event. Consider these models [created by Mitchell Beer of Smarter Shift](#).¹



There's no afterlife. Marketers have the unenviable task of annually re-booting relationships to drum up excitement and remind people why they should attend 30 to 60 days prior. It's an exhausting and unsustainable model.

Think about how much easier pre-show marketing would be if our events generated this kind of community.



Ideally, conversations would start beforehand and amplify at the event. Ideas and relationships sparked by face-to-face contact would continue to grow afterwards.

So how do we accomplish this?

¹ Special thanks to [Mitchell Beer of Smarter Shift](#) for sharing his thoughts and illustrations of the current and ideal communication cycle for events. The diagrams are based on ones he presented at Event Camp Twin Cities 2011.

That was the question posed to [attendees of PYM LIVE Jacksonville on Feb. 6](#). We challenged groups of meeting planners and suppliers to come up with at least one strategy to generate excitement pre-show, something they could do to engage audiences during the show and one thing that would keep them talking post-show. Here are their ideas.

Pre-show ideas

1. Distribute a QR code or link to education attendees could view prior to the event. Discussions would begin off-site and continue in-depth at the event.
2. Clearly communicate what attendees can expect (resisting the urge to be clever with the marketing copy).
3. Create an attendee referral program.
4. Help attendees form teams prior to arrival. Give them the meeting's theme and instructions on what they should create together. Whatever they prepare would be used/displayed at the event.
5. Pepper reminder emails with incentives to come. If you have money in the budget to do so, combine with a direct mail campaign filled with "breadcrumb" tchotchkes that are fun reminders of the event theme, destination or content they'd experience on-site.

During show ideas

1. Create 5-minute breaks where people can participate in ice-breakers like 2 Truths and a Lie, solve puzzles or just tell jokes.
2. Keep educational topics current and relevant to the audience and the challenges they are facing.
3. Seat attendees at roundtables where they drill down from a general topic to one specific aspect of that topic they would all like to discuss or have in common. Have them discuss that specific item in depth and share what they discovered with the larger group. Expand on those micro-discussions as the event goes on or post-show in social communities.

Post-show ideas

1. Create a photo gallery of images on Smilebox, Facebook or another online host and distribute to attendees post-event so they can comment and share.
2. Share post-event survey results with the attendees and let them know what you plan to change because of their feedback. Then create a case study that shows what happened after you implemented those changes. Share that as well.
3. Create a post-show reception where people can bond over drinks.

4. Send handwritten notes to attendees or personalized emails rather than a blanket email.
5. Have attendees pledge to focus on staying in touch with 5 people they met at the event. Offer them incentives to share their stories about how they followed through on that promise.
6. Create a puzzle or news-bubble that is sent to past attendees. It should be a fun reminder of what they enjoyed at the event. When decrypted, it tells them what the next steps are.

Let's keep the conversation going

Do you have other ideas for engaging attendees pre-, during or post-show? Tweet them [@PYMLive](#), share them [on our Facebook page](#) or in [our G+ Community](#) and tag them #yaypym.

Every month, we'll be talking about the future of meetings in our social communities, on [PlanYourMeetings.com](#) and at [our PYM LIVE Events](#). Want information delivered directly to your inbox? [Subscriptions to PYM are free](#) for meeting and event planners, so share us with your friends.