

ABOUT GREAT EVENTS – AND HOW THEY ARE MADE

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For anyone involved with events, trade fairs, brand worlds – meaning “live communication” –there is perhaps nothing more enjoyable than experiencing a truly great event. An event staged so that it grips, involves and moves visitors and brings about a change within them – their attitude to the host, their degree of knowledge, their motivation, or their willingness to buy, for example.

Influencing the guests is ultimately what events are really all about and what distinguishes effective events from all the others.

However, how does one put together events that bring about changes in their visitors? Why have there been so few of them up until now? And what can one learn from successful examples and apply to one’s own work?

Those responsible for events tend to act quickly and decisively, as it is their job. This is understandable, but it is also part of the problem. Those who would like to improve the results of their work in the long term have to make fundamental changes to their approach to the concept of events.

Events have basically barely evolved over the last 15 years, apart from the excited and largely unfounded social media hype surrounding them. Many concepts continue to draw on the same ingredients, with only the combination or the ratios changing.

For quite a while this has also more or less worked. Someone extended an invitation, people went there, experienced something (sometimes quite a surprise) and then went back home feeling satiated and more or less intoxicated, but often without an answer to the question of what it was all for.

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An event is not an end in itself

This is the fundamental misunderstanding that has to be cleared up. The medium is not the message. An event is not an end in itself. A celebration is not an objective. Events are not simply a stringing together of logistical processes. Events are not just about a perfectly coordinated series of get-togethers, talks, emotional show acts, catering and networking.

Instead, events are communicative measures that have to be planned strategically. They make a company and its products tangible and accessible and forge authenticity. Therefore, in our experience-orientated times, they are almost as important as the product that they are meant to advertise.

Those who understand events merely as logistical feats will have guests who are satiated in every sense of the word. Those who view events as a communicative platform, on the other hand, have a versatile, contemporary and highly effective tool at their disposal.

How does one go about setting up the impressive events that we all – whether as a guest or as a host – long for and that are also the subject of this book? By focussing on a goal and applying a well-known and time-proven triad: anamnesis, diagnosis, therapy.

At the start of every event concept it is important to examine the root of the problem and what (communication) task has to be solved. As the client is often not quite sure or aware of this, a successful event organiser has to be good at asking questions and somebody who can reveal what is beneath the surface.

When visiting a doctor, a clear distinction has to be made between the symptom and the cause. It is only this comprehensive gathering of facts that can lead to the necessary understanding for making a clear diagnosis. To continue in the language of medicine, it is only on the basis of these findings that a suitable treatment can be prescribed.

What is the objective of the event?

Therefore instead of thinking immediately about “what” and “how”, in the first instance one should consider very carefully “why” and “what for”. What is the objective of the event? What effect should it achieve? What influence should it have on the guest?

It is evident that these questions place the guest at the centre of events. This is important and how it should be, as the guest is indeed the central focus and the main protagonist of every event – even if in reality he or she is not always treated that way.

Another aspect of applying this approach is that the objective and the effect that is to be achieved inevitably focus on bringing about a change, as it is very rare for the goal of the event to be the manifestation of the status quo.

If the sought-after and realistic change is described precisely and quantifiably, then the event concept is well on its way to achieving its objective. One then “only” has to answer the question of what staging methods to use to bring about the required change. How can the event concept contribute to transforming the described status quo (for example the limited motivation of the employees with regard to a merger) into the target state? How can the willingness to buy be increased from x to y %? And so on and so forth. Such briefs lead to creative event concepts that usually cover at least three aspects: enjoyment, purpose and effect.

In the first instance, good events are indeed simply enjoyable, for all those involved and for the guests. They soon recognise that the occasion is not about ticking off programme items, but about sharing something: applicable knowledge, emotions, memorable and shared experiences.

However, events conceived this way are also very enjoyable for the hosts, those responsible for the event and their bosses. Apart from the personal pride in what has been achieved, they also realise that such an event casts a positive light on their company and its brand messages. Of course the evident satisfaction of the guests has a direct effect on the organisers.

This enjoyment is coupled with the meaning and purpose that such great concepts are based on. In a society in which time is such an important commodity, event visitors demand meaningful experiences, which represent a tangible added value that goes far beyond appropriate catering, high-class entertainment and the proverbial nice evening.

Then there is the third dimension of an event, perhaps the most important: its effect, which goes way beyond what is usually described by the catchword “public relations”.

Now all that remains is to measure what has been achieved. Against all preconceptions, this is easier and cheaper than one might think. Thus event control not only paves the way for targeted creativity, but also becomes the event organiser’s greatest ally, who can suddenly prove that the nice evening was a lot more than just nice. It was an important building block for the future economic success of the company.