

It's a safe bet to assume that anyone reading this article has, at some point during their career, been stuck in a meeting that they couldn't wait to escape. Come on, be honest. You've stifled yawns and struggled to avoid the inevitable head bobs as you dozed off. Just admit it!

The sad fact is, someone planned that meeting and they probably planned it hoping it would be both informative and at least a little bit exciting. How can you ensure the meetings and events you plan keep people awake and eager to be there? Here are a few handy tips:

Location, location, location

Let's say it one more time...location! Imagine your meeting room at your office. Chances are there are some nice pictures on the walls. Semi-comfortable chairs. Maybe there are even some bowls of candy set out. That's fine for your run-of-the-mill day-to-day meetings. But when you're planning an event outside the confines of the office, don't you want it to stand out?

Meeting planners today have it tough. They have to plan events that people will see value in attending (educational workshops,

an informative speaker, an exciting product release, etc.), they have to have something to entice people to attend (golf tournaments, networking events, social outings), and they have to plan this on a budget!

One sure-fire way to entice people to attend is to hold the event at a unique venue...and you can bet Western Canada is full of these! Each province has a tourism bureau that can help you pinpoint the distinctive locations, hotels and meeting facilities that will meet your needs.

This issue of ConnectWest features one such location on its cover—the The King Pacific Lodge, located in British Columbia. This fly-in luxury wilderness lodge and resort is located in the heart of the Great Bear Rainforest on the west coast of the province. Surrounded by pristine wilderness, meeting attendees to events at this location will have ample time to unwind and recharge, as well as the opportunity to participate in working sessions designed to build relationships, and foster innovative business planning ideas.

One thing that sets this lodge apart is their focus on “corporate adventure”. From hiking, fishing, GPS navigating and kayaking, you can be sure that your event-attendees

will want to be there. “Adventures are led by expert facilitators and guides, and all activities are tailored to suit the physical makeup of the group.

What'd you say?!

Memorable location: check. Now what? Speakers, of course! Your first goal will be to establish what the goal of the speaker(s) is (to draw in more attendees, to impart wisdom, to motivate, etc.). Bob Hooey, a Canadian Motivational Speaker himself says, “if properly selected and matched to the group's goals and theme, a speaker can make a program shine. It's not ‘just’ about what the audience does at the event, it is about what they do differently when they return home or back to their respective roles and jobs.”

Hooey, who speaks at 30 to 40 events per year, explains that a memorable speaker is one who has done their homework and has invested their time to ensure that what they deliver is relevant and useful to the attendees. But it's not all up to the speaker—some of the onus is on the event planner to make sure this happens. “Make sure you have talked about the upcoming event more than once with the speaker. Be clear in your expectations so they have a better idea of how to prepare.”

Hooey says that he provides all his clients with a two page questionnaire that helps them help him. He also suggests to:

- Put them in contact with at least five people who will be in the audience who are representative of the audience make up.
- Send them any relevant items on your group or organization so that they can study to get a better idea of the group.
- Let them know who you've had in the past who did a great job.

“Speakers who are memorable have done their homework about the needs and desires of the group,” says Hooey. They

Memorable Meetings



have invested time to ensure what they deliver is relevant and useful. Following that, their expertise in being able to deliver that information in an engaging, challenging, and perhaps a fun manner makes a big difference. I've found when I have done my homework and am speaking directly to the needs of an audience I am able to go on stage and have fun. When that happens so does the audience. That is memorable."

Hooley suggests that event planners should check out speakers online and in particular, look for video clips taken from past events. Hooley posts clips of his work online (www.ideaman.net) and likes the fact that potential clients can see him in action.

Hooley has traveled the world for speaking engagements but says, "the best events were the ones where I experienced a genuine connection with the audience. As a speaker, you can tell when that happens and it is magical."

Yuk it up after hours

The location is picked. The speakers are prepped and prepared. All that's left is planning the kind of after-hours activities that will entice your attendees to come out and have some fun. These events are also ideal for networking and for getting to know the event-host(s) and colleagues on a more personal (and appropriate) level.

There are many different ways to go: golf tournaments, wine and cheese events, local area tours, dances, etc. An ageless classic though, has always been hiring a comedian.

Stacey Gibb, Vice President of Funny Business Inc. & Yuk Yuk's On Tour, believes that because "laughter is always memorable" hiring a professional corporate comedian to perform is a smart idea. "I think it's safe to say most people can relate to comedy. The saying 'it's funny because it's true' IS true in this industry. I've had some wonderful letters from different companies saying this was the first time they tried comedy and it was a smashing hit. I've also had repeat customers for the past 10 years and every year they still get excited when they are put in charge of booking the comedy act."

Gibb says comedians can offer a lot more than a few minutes on stage. They can be hired to emcee an event, turning a long afternoon of speakers and information overload into a fun day. Many comedians will also research the company and write their bit specifically for the event, providing attendees with 45 to 60 minutes of after-dinner fun to loosen up after a long day. "Comedy allows everyone to release their stress through laughter, and to take a step back from their busy day-to-day life," says Gibb.

Picking the right comedian can take a little bit of elbow grease. Gibb says, "event planners should give the agent as many details about the event and attendees as possible. They should be very specific whether there are any language or content restrictions."

Stage set-up is also very important because the better the set-up, the more comfortable the comedian. Gibb suggests that there should be a quiet spot for the comedian to "prepare and focus before the show. As well, an introduction from the event organizer is always appreciated by the comedian. The event planner can ask the agent to provide a small written introduction listing a couple of the comedian's credits. The agent will also ensure the comedian is well informed and may ask the comedians to call the organizer a couple of days in advance to go over the details in person. It's a nice way to break the ice and make sure everyone is at ease."

In the end, every company has different requirements. Gibb says she's been asked to provide comedians for squeaky clean shows and X-rated ones, for events with 10 people and 1,000 people, and for audiences of 20-something attendees and retired attendees. The common element, says Gibb, is "not every comedian is perfect for every event, but there's always a perfect comedian for every event and it's your agent's job to know the comedians and to take the information the event planner has provided to make sure the best possible comedian is put in place for their event."

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