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# Secrets of Sales Meeting Success

ON SALES MEETINGS



APRIL 2016

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## Introduction

### How effective are your sales meetings?

**Whether the reach of your sales force is small and local, national, or international, the annual sales meeting is probably one of your company's most important events, if not the most important. And for many salespeople, who are often remotely situated, the kickoff may be one of few opportunities to connect face to face with senior leaders and peers, interact with the company as a whole and hear the call to align with its vision and sales strategies.**

When done properly, however, ROI proves the ultimate value of a trade show or large meeting. Strong ROI demonstrates accountability for expenditures, secures approval for the event, and allocates funding. It clarifies the business problems and the solutions resulting from the investment. It also significantly increases the value of event managers, who are able to achieve more credibility for themselves and their teams as business strategists.

With so much at stake, the success of the sales meeting is critical. Sales professionals deserve and expect a meeting equal to or exceeding the value of the time they would otherwise be working their pipeline. This article is packed with ideas and recommendations to help you plan and execute such a meeting. For a rich compilation of additional ideas for sales meetings, user conferences, and other large meetings, see our white paper, [General Session Excellence: Driving Home Content & Improving Buy-In from Walk-In to Wrap-Up](#).

## Clear objectives

The worst reason to hold a meeting: because it's expected. Without clear, compelling objectives there is little value in a sales meeting, no matter its size. Identifying those objectives begins with gathering good data—from top management, influencers, customers, and other stakeholders—well in advance of the event. Objectives are determined by the company's problems and its strategic solutions to those problems:

What are the company goals, and where are the gaps in meeting them?

What general and specific actions and outcomes are needed in support of those goals?

- How will the meeting support or enable those actions?
- What areas of education or training are needed?
- How should attendee feedback from the last sales meeting inform the one now being planned?
- How will the success of the meeting be measured against the objectives?

Sales professionals deserve and expect a meeting equal to or exceeding the value of the time they would otherwise be working their pipeline.

The most important stakeholders, arguably, are the sales team itself. As such, it is essential that they have a voice in the meeting plans. They are the experts on their challenges. They know what works, what doesn't, and what they need to succeed. What do your front-line professionals recommend for the meeting's theme, content tracks, and activities? How do they hope to benefit from the event? Eliciting their input not only ensures a more on-target meeting, it sends an empowering message that their voices count and increases buy-in.

Objectives inform agendas. Attendees are eager to discover what's new in areas such as the company vision and strategy, sales goals, messaging, metrics, pricing, markets, compensation, metrics, CRM tools, regulatory requirements, lead generation initiatives, competition assessments, best practices, product reviews and updates, and more.

With so many potential areas to cover, one of the greatest challenges is deciding what information to include. Regardless of the amount of content, however, no sales meeting should exceed two days. Exceptions might include resorts and conference centers in exciting destinations, where the time spent in presentations is offset by a variety of dining and entertainment offerings. (Yet, each hour of conference means pipelines are underserved, paradise notwithstanding.)

With hard and soft objectives identified,  
theme possibilities emerge.

In addition to the kind of “hard” objectives already mentioned, “soft” objectives play major roles in successful sales meetings. Soft objectives include:

- Creating a sense of community
- Building team spirit
- Encouraging friendly competition
- Instilling a sense of pride or loyalty
- Improving communication and presentation skills
- Developing better customer trust and rapport
- Developing a positive attitude
- Getting and staying motivated

Sales meetings are occasions in which heightened positive emotions should be encouraged to evoke a collective experience of connection and purpose. Emotion creates alignment. Your corporate culture may be “all business,” but your kickoff is an opportunity to *inspire* the sales force, nurturing their sense of community and competitiveness alike. They want the meeting to set them on fire.

### Theme Development

With hard and soft objectives identified, theme possibilities emerge. The theme establishes the meeting intent and sets attendee expectations. Sales meeting themes typically evoke the spirited mood of “high fives,” as in the following examples:

- **Aspirational:** “Going Beyond Limits,” “Countdown to 100-Percent Customer Satisfaction”
- **Celebratory:** “Ain’t No Stoppin Us Now,” “We Did It Once, Let’s Do It Again!”
- **Challenging:** “Got What It Takes?,” “Do You Have the Power?”

The next task is to fully develop the theme, which may be strengthened by use of an analogy. For example, a company committed to entering new markets might choose a conquering theme such as “No Limits” to convey their aspirations. “No Limits,” in turn, could suggest extreme sports such as whitewater canoeing or wingsuit flying. The company builds continuity by ensuring that the theme and its related image(s) appear in all of the event’s email communications, invitations, slide templates, video lead-ins, breakouts signage, and stage design. The theme can be further integrated in the speakers’ content, awards ceremony, and attendee games and activities (though wingsuit flying could present some liabilities!).

Given the competitive, often-aggressive nature of sales, sports themes provide apt analogies for many meetings. Virtually any sport can serve as a tie-in, though it pays to know your audience. Does the majority share the emotional connection to football or NASCAR that you’re counting on to motivate them? If not, more inclusive areas might be health and fitness, the space program, rock ‘n roll, successful entrepreneurs, or even a generic “race to the finish.”

Does the majority share the emotional connection to football or NASCAR that you're counting on to motivate them?

To keep things fresh for the team, be sure to vary the theme, format and agenda from year to year. Create attendee anticipation for the kickoff with enticing email blasts, video promos, or previews of planned outings and evening events. And make plans to keep the momentum going after the meeting by incorporating the kickoff theme into your smaller sales meetings throughout the year.

Despite the invigorating themes illustrated so far, not every theme needs to be a chest-thumper. Themes such as "Strengthen Your Pipeline" or "Negotiating for Sales Success" emphasize more business-oriented objectives. They also narrow the focus of the meeting, which could be ideal depending on the objectives. Such "back to basics" themes are often the right choice for companies recovering from a year in which celebration or gauntlet-throwing would be the wrong response.

At the very least, the kickoff can celebrate the end of a bad year and the beginning of a more hopeful one.

### **When Times Are Tough**

It's easy to celebrate when sales are good, but when sales are down or promised products are late to market, a festive mood might seem phony and inappropriate. How can a company sponsor a sales meeting under such disappointing circumstances?

By not letting attendees lick their wounds.

In the words of an old proverb, "What is defeat? Nothing but education; nothing but the first steps to something better." At the very least, the kickoff can celebrate the end of a bad year and the beginning of a more hopeful one.

In a low-numbers year, leaders should avoid any language or tone that hints at criticizing or shaming the sales force, who, being self-motivators, probably have already come down hard on themselves. Instead, use the meeting to offer ideas, tools, resources, and moral support. Be realistic and transparent about any obstacles to success in the system itself, and resolute about correcting these. In what ways, if any, does the company get in the way of the sales team being able to perform effectively? Even in the absence of clear solutions, full disclosure can go a long way toward building morale.

Teambuilding activities should be designed to meet the hard or soft objectives identified in the initial planning process.

### **Team-building Activities**

According to Forbes, the number of people working from home in 2014 increased 26 percent over the previous year. While the job functions of the home-based workforce increasingly include operations, business development and communications, sales continues to be among the top five groups of telecommuters, particularly in large companies.

One of the downsides of salespeople working from home, however, is the reduction or absence of face-to-face interaction with the corporate community. Emails and conference calls do little to combat the potential for feelings of isolation. Though every sales force has its share of system-bucking mavericks, even the most entrepreneurial among them are likely to be outgoing and sociable. For many companies, the kickoff meeting presents the sales force with a rare opportunity to meet, mingle, learn from their peers, and have a shared experience of what it means to be part of the team.

Teambuilding is often a top objective in sales events. Although there are virtually thousands of activities that can be implemented for teambuilding purposes, the most effective ones feature a goal, a time limit, and a structure that requires participants to depend on each other in order to succeed. While friendly competition may be encouraged between teams, cooperation within each team is the primary value.

Teambuilding activities should be designed to meet the hard or soft objectives identified in the initial planning process. Activities are more successful when the participants, in addition to having fun, can discern some message or value in them. Toward that end, should the activity emphasize listening? Creativity? Prioritizing? Problem solving? Endurance? Showmanship? And how are the teams to be created? Is there greater benefit in assigning people to teams with others they know and work with, or would your objectives be optimally met by having them interact with people they don't know?

Millicare, a national textile and carpet company, wanted to create a sales kickoff-like atmosphere at its annual franchisee meeting. Their objective was to motivate service excellence, deepen brand loyalty, and build community among the geographically dispersed franchisees. The venue, a resort, featured spacious kitchen and dining areas—which inspired the idea for a chili cook-off in lieu of a traditional buffet luncheon.

Sales professionals enjoy the chance to blow off some steam with their peers.

Attendees were randomly broken into teams of 15-20 people. Each team was given its own food preparation station stocked with cooking utensils and a wide range of ingredients. Their mission was to create the winning chili recipe as judged by a panel of experts. Attendees immediately got to work assigning tasks, chopping vegetables, selecting seasonings, and working against the clock to produce the perfect chili. In addition, the teams had to come up with a name and marketing slogan for their chili recipes. Once the winners were announced, the teams—who had quickly bonded with their fellow chefs—sat down to enjoy their chili creations as well as sampling the chili of rival teams.

The pressure to meet quotas makes selling stressful. Sales professionals enjoy the chance to blow off some steam with their peers. Many teambuilding activities, like the one just described, help to fulfill that purpose.

At its annual kickoff, ExacTech, a leader in surgical instrumentation, wanted to give its fun-loving salespeople a good time while enabling them to build stronger connections with one another. The solution was a teambuilding evening set at the University of Florida field house in Gainesville. The mostly-young sales team, about 80 percent male, was divided into teams by region to compete in various activities involving unusual physical challenges.

In one challenge, participants donned Velcro suits and hurled themselves against Velcro walls—trying their best to stick to the surface at the highest point possible. The event also featured obstacles courses, gladiator jousting, sumo-suit wrestling, and adult bounce houses.

An increasingly popular teambuilding activity, “escape rooms,” offers a more cerebral experience. Teams are locked into a room in which they must solve clues that will lead to the discovery of a hidden key—or a secret passage—which will enable their escape. Despite the great variety of escape-room experiences available worldwide, most cannot accommodate more than a dozen participants at one time (though some have multiple rooms). If you book an escape room, protect your company from liability. Get proof from the vendor that each room contains a clearly marked and always-accessible emergency exit.



If your company is planning to release a new product, consider having sales teams compete by creating short marketing videos for the product. Give the winning team(s) an award that ties into your meeting theme. Aside from being fun and entertaining, some of the videos may yield specific language or concepts that could be useful in the actual campaign.

For more teambuilding ideas and examples, see our white paper, [Gamification: Winning the Engagement Challenge at Tradeshows and Events](#).

To what degree has their behavior changed? Have they had opportunities to use the skills, and in what situations?

### Edutainment

The most successful sales kickoffs make effective use of “edutainment,” a creative blend of education and entertainment. The primary medium for edutainment is theatrical vignettes or sketch comedy — the kind featured weekly on TV’s *Saturday Night Live*. A well-written, well-cast vignette can achieve any or all of the following:

- Inject levity into otherwise serious or dry subjects
- Poke fun at the competition (salespeople bond when opposing a common “enemy”)
- Share “in” jokes
- Address key learning objectives in fun and memorable ways
- Use funny analogies to make serious points
- Exaggerate fears or bad sales habits to the point of absurdity
- Humanize top management by featuring them in vignettes

For its sales kickoff, an international franchise organization hired professional actors skilled in comedy to perform three different vignettes. One scene, a spoof of the famous courtroom scene in the movie *A Few Good Men*, served to provide a tutorial on effective “questioning techniques” for use in consultative sales. A takeoff on the vintage TV game show *The Dating Game* featured a young woman interviewing three different solution vendors. The last vignette, a soap opera parody, created an over-the-top, tongue-in-cheek drama that had audiences laughing while learning about the costs of doing “business as usual.”

Whether live or video, vignettes can be big crowd-pleasers — provided the concept and writing are strong, the right people are cast, the production details are handled well, the direction is smart, and, if videotaped, the editing enhances the vignette with the best cuts, music, or special effects.

Awards and recognition events, whether stand-alone or integrated within a sales meeting, are vital opportunities to recognize both individual and collective achievements, incentivize the sales team, and say “thank you” for jobs well done.

### **Award Presentations**

Salespeople enjoy public recognition. Awards and recognition events, whether stand-alone or integrated within a sales meeting, are vital opportunities to recognize both individual and collective achievements, incentivize the sales team, and say “thank you” for jobs well done. Each company has its own criteria for awards. Recognition may be given to salespersons for achievements such as making the highest sales, showing the greatest improvement in incremental sales, or penetrating new markets most effectively.

In addition to an inscribed plaque or trophy, recognition may be given through money, company stock, or gift cards; additional paid time off; team outings or family trips; assignments to higher-value sales territories; or status-enhancing memberships in exclusive golf clubs or health clubs.

To what degree has their behavior changed? Have they had opportunities to use the skills, and in what situations?

Regardless of the form of the awards, their presentation is often the highlight of a sales meeting. Therefore, it is critical to stage award presentations in ways that work well thematically, logistically, and emotionally. Here are some guidelines for making your next awards segment exceptional:

**Momentum.** In the ideal scenario, the audience applauds until the winner reaches the podium. This rarely happens, however, for two reasons. First, there may be a long “winners trek” to the stage that strains the audience’s willingness to sustain their applause. Second, depending on the duration of the awards segment, the audience may simply tire of applauding. The result is the dreaded “dead air time,” to borrow a broadcasting term, in which nothing is happening. Momentum falters. And in such empty silences people inevitably distract themselves with their smart phones and tablets.

Fortunately there are preventative measures to combat the yawn of “winners trek.” Here are a few effective tactics:

- **Stageside seating.** Unless the awards will be a surprise to recipients, seat the winners near the stage, if not on the stage. Their travel time to the podium is thus significantly reduced.
- **Camera pickup.** Awards evoke emotions – the pride of achievement, the pleasure of recognition, or the surprise in having won. To capture these emotions have live video cameras capture the winners’ faces as they respond to their names being announced and head to the stage. Rather than watch the backs of their peers as they approach the stage, the audience can enjoy seeing their faces in closeup, even if the venue is large and filled with hundreds of people.
- **Music.** High-energy music should play from the moment a winner is announced until the time he or she arrives onstage. Music is key to maintain energy and momentum. Choose music that complements the theme.
- **Winner profiles.** The longer the anticipated walks to the stage, the more important it will be for the MC to “fill” the down time with winner profiles. Winner profiles are brief, scripted facts about each recipient gathered well in advance of the sales meeting. Here is an example of a winner profile:

*“And the winner of Highest Sales-Northeast Region, is Lisa Alvarez! Linda has been with ATX for ten years and this is her first award with us. She began her ATX career as a supply chain director before joining the sales team. She lives in Baltimore with her husband, Mark, and their twins Kayla and Kevin.”*

The winner profiles may be handled live by the MC or as pre-produced video packages. They not only fill the walk-to-stage time but provide the audience with information about their peers, potentially enhancing the sense of community.

Even with all of these tactics in place, it’s a good idea for the MC to ask the soon-to-be-announced winners to hustle (safely) to the stage before the first recipient is announced. It may also be necessary for the MC to explain where recipients should enter and exit the stage, unless a rehearsal has taken place.

**Rehearse the handoff.** If your recipients know they’re slated to receive awards, schedule a rehearsal for the awards segment. This is an opportunity for the show producer to familiarize the winners with the particular “choreography” of the award presentation, answering important questions such as:

*Will I enter the stage from the center, left or right?*

*Am I expected to shake someone’s hand while I’m holding the award? If so, could the weight or size of the award make that awkward?*

*Will I be posing for a photo?*

*Do I exit the stage once I have my award or wait for other winners to join me onstage?*

*If I’m expected to say a few words, where do I put the award?*

Removing the guesswork for recipients by making the awards staging clear and comfortable is an additional way to honor them.

The show producer should have a plan for the award segment including the placement of the awards onstage, deciding whether the awards will be immediately visible or unveiled, who will be handing out the awards, whether the recipients will take home the awards or have them shipped to them, and other key logistical details.

To maximize the brand connection, consider staging the photos so that the company logo or show theme is visible in the background of the recipient.

**Photos.** Recipients want and expect photos of themselves receiving their awards, preferably with top management. These photos can also have a useful promotional life in social media and company newsletters. To maximize the brand connection, consider staging the photos so that the company logo or show theme is visible in the background of the recipient.

By the same token, if your meeting is at a resort or conference center, ensure that your logo appears on the front of the lectern, rather than the name of the venue that has supplied the lectern. This can be achieved simply by attaching a branded card over the venue name.

### Guest Speakers

The right guest speaker is one who can help you meet your specific meeting objectives. An industry analyst or expert, for example, can add external validation to your company's vision and strategy, reminding the audience that they are working for a winner. A celebrity speaker can add glamour to your event (if not always substance), generating excitement in the sales team and creating instant buzz on social media. A motivational speaker can entertain and motivate, or even inspire, your audience. Because motivational speakers are the most popular choice for sales meetings, we've outlined some considerations below for choosing and working with a motivational speaker.

The right guest speaker is one who can help you meet your specific meeting objectives.

**Speaker Selection.** The most obvious choice for a motivational speaker is one who is closely connected with your business or industry. But there may be value in finding a speaker from outside the familiar orbit of your business, someone who can bring an altogether new and refreshing perspective—especially if you’ve gotten into the habit of featuring only sales gurus year after year. Provided the speaker’s message is relevant or analogous to your meeting theme, the differences between your business and theirs will be less important.

For example, a retired, accomplished surgeon might be the perfect voice for articulating the importance of teamwork. A star mediator could illuminate the power of negotiating. A jazz musician could inspire your sales force by helping them see how listening, flexibility, timing, and rapport are as instrumental in sales as they are to making music.

If the speaker does not ask you a lot of questions, be suspicious.

**Content.** Most motivational speakers offer a menu of topics that are their signature speeches, their stock in trade, which they’ve honed to perfection. But even when a speaker’s topic perfectly matches your needs, it’s important to work closely with them in advance to make sure they understand your audience profile, meeting objectives, and the issues being addressed at the event. (If the speaker does not ask you a lot of questions, be suspicious.)

Ask the speaker how they will customize the speech. Effective customization requires more than an occasional insertion of your company name in the remarks, which can come across as patronizing to the audience. The speaker’s credibility is enhanced to the degree that she demonstrates to your audience her understanding of your company and your specific challenges—and offers actionable solutions.

**Placement.** Positioning a motivational speaker very early or at the start of the show can get the audience pumped up for everything that follows. The audience’s heightened receptivity can then benefit all subsequent presenters. Conversely, a powerhouse speaker who opens your show can be a hard act to follow, making even good presenters seem lackluster in comparison. If this is a concern, schedule the speaker to close the first or second day of the meeting. The meeting will end on a guaranteed high note. Bonus: if the speaker makes references to key points made in the earlier presentations, and skillfully combines his or her message with the company message, the impact will be that much richer.

**Self-Promotion.** Appropriate to their profession, motivational speakers are not shy about selling—which makes them authentically qualified to encourage boldness in their audiences. Unless otherwise directed, however, some speakers cannot resist throwing pitches for their programs and products into their speeches. Doing so may make them come across as self-serving to your audience. It's a turn-off.

Make it clear to the speaker what your boundaries are regarding self-promotion. If they have a book to sell that would be valuable for your sales team, consider purchasing the books in quantity for use as an ongoing resource. But place a limit on the sales happening at the lectern.

### **Giving Speaker Introductions**

In many large sales meetings, speakers are introduced by an offstage announcer, live or prerecorded, known in the industry as the Voice of God (VOG). The VOG is heard most commonly in internal meetings in which the audience already knows the speakers. For these meetings, brief audio introductions like “Ladies and gentlemen, your VP of Sales, Chris Parker” suffice. No setup is needed for the audience to understand the speaker's role or significance to the meeting.

When guest speakers enter the picture, however, the VOG is too cursory; more detailed introductions are required. As a show of respect, the event host or master of ceremonies (MC) is expected to provide a proper introduction that explains, briefly, who the speaker is and build anticipation for his or her remarks.

Though most guest speakers will provide their own introductions for the host to read, don't be afraid to edit if necessary. The introduction should be only as long as it takes to establish the speaker's credibility—the names of their children, organizations they belong to, and charities they support may not serve that purpose. Regardless of the speaker's accomplishments the introduction should not exceed one minute.

When the speaker is an ambassador for an organization or a partner company, keep the introduction focused on their organization or company, not on the speaker. It isn't relevant for the audience to know where the representative was educated or what jobs he or she held before joining their organization. In such cases it's not about the speaker, it's about the message they bring as ambassador.

At the conclusion of each introduction, use music to add energy and pizzazz to speaker entrances, and once again at their exits.

**Personalize Introductions.** In sales meetings in which VOG is not used, the meeting host or MC handles the introductions. As the meeting's primary guide and community builder, the MC is responsible for creating a hospitable, inclusive tone for the event. Beyond providing information about the speakers, the MC's introductions can convey a feeling about the speakers that foster a sense of extended family. Informality equates to friendliness, as in this example:

“For the last three years, our next presenter, Tania Atkins, has been our top producer on the West Coast. Last month, Tania injured her right hand playing racquetball—now we know why your emails were looking a little funny, Tania!—but that hasn't stopped her from knocking on the doors of every prospect in her territory. This morning, she's going to share her best practices for going the extra mile when serving our customers. Please give a warm welcome to Tania Atkins!”

Beyond providing information about the speakers, the MC's introductions can convey a *feeling* about the speakers that foster a sense of extended family.

**No favorites.** It's a natural instinct for an MC to augment an introduction with a personal remark about a presenter, such as "Sam's not only a major mover and shaker in product development, he's also one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet." Such statements easily convey appreciation, warmth and spontaneity. But unless all of the speakers are praised, in turn, in for their respective virtues, the omission could be stinging, especially if the MC is also the boss. MCs are thus well advised to refrain from making remarks of a personal nature about a speaker unless the MC is prepared to do the same for all of the presenters.

**Vary the introductions.** Unless you're using VOG, you have opportunities to make speaker introductions as varied as the speakers themselves. A little creativity in this area can increase audience engagement by raising their level of curiosity. Here are a few examples of how an introduction can make the difference between an audience tuning in or tuning out:

**Standard:** *"Bob Smith is here to talk about breaking through customer barriers. Here's Bob."*

**Secrets:** *"Our next speaker knows a thing or two about breaking customer barriers. And he's here to share his that have helped increase our Midwest sales by 26% last quarter. Here to tell us how he does it, so that YOU can do it, too, is our own Bob Smith."*

**Challenges:** *"What would you do if your top customer suddenly stopped taking your calls and informed you by text that they were taking their business to your top competitor that had moved right across from their office? That's what happened in Bob Smith's territory. But Bob didn't get frazzled. Instead, he got strategic. And he's here to tell us about it ..."*

**Thematic integration:** *"This meeting is about Leveraging the Power of Relationships. Our next speaker, as you'll quickly discover, has turned relationship building into an art form. And he's here today to walk us through his three-point approach for turning prospects into customers for life. Please welcome Bob Smith."*

Making introductions unpredictable keeps audiences engaged. It also makes the function more enjoyable for the MC and respects the speaker by providing an introduction that is as unique as his or her presentation.

Videos, too, can be enhanced by strong introductions. Rather than no introduction or a weak one ("Okay, let's look at this video ..."), set it up in a way that makes the audience think twice about checking their emails. Consider these examples:

*“We recently interviewed several of our channel partners, and asked them ‘In what ways do we make it challenging to partner with us, and what would make it easier to do so?’ Here’s what we heard ...”*

*“We take you now to Abu Dhabi, the wealthiest country on earth, where we met a man who has changed the way we think about our business ...”*

Not all videos in your meeting may require a setup or recap. The content team can decide which videos, if any, can roll without a lead-in.

**Smooth transitions.** During the applause, the MC returns to the stage to thank the presenter and introduce the next segment. To avoid a too-abrupt transition, the MC should validate the value of the presentation just seen, provide a quick recap of its most salient points, or offer a thoughtful comment. This not only reinforces the importance of the message, it gives the audience time to soak in the ideas before shifting their attention to the next presenter.

The MC must then transition seamlessly to the subsequent speaker, though few people are skilled at doing this without a script. Note the smoothness of this scripted transition example:

*“Thank you, Glenn. The new regulatory requirements that Glenn just outlined will require us to make some fundamental changes in the way we sell our products. And yet, our next presenter is here to show us how these changes offer us some surprising opportunities, both short term and long term ...”*

Solidly scripted transitions are a mark of a professionally produced sales meeting. Without them, most MCs are inclined to ramble or jump too hastily from one introduction to the next.

Solidly scripted transitions are a mark of a professionally produced sales meeting.

### **Hire an MC?**

Some companies opt to hire a professional MC rather than recruit one from their ranks. The right choice for any organization is an experienced professional who thinks quickly on his or her feet, is engaging, a fast learner, and is properly briefed on the corporate culture and meeting objectives. Candidates can be vetted through live auditions or sample videos.

The potential disadvantage of hired guns is that they are unknown to your sales force. It could take a couple of onstage appearances for them to build credibility and rapport with the audience. But the advantages of a professional MC are many. The best ones are adept at keeping the energy high and the pace crisp. They can typically rehearse in half the time, or less, than nonprofessionals in the role, and make scripted lines sound spontaneous and conversational.



The most in-demand MCs are also meticulous about ensuring the correct pronunciation of names—of no small importance in a multicultural workforce. Equally essential, they know how to improvise in the event of technical mishaps or other surprises. If you opt for a non-professional MC, be sure to provide him or her with presentation coaching. (For more information on presentation effectiveness see our white paper, [Master Your Message, Maximize Your Impact](#))

These and other data help remove guesswork so that the meeting is driven by the most compelling needs of the business.

### **Sales Meeting Measurement**

Earlier in this article, we discussed the importance of basing the meeting objectives and agenda on sales numbers, an analysis of what did/did not work well in the previous conference, and input from stakeholders including the salespeople themselves. These and other data help remove guesswork so that the meeting is driven by the most compelling needs of the business.

Here are examples of the kinds of objectives that could inform the purpose of a sales meeting:

- Increase sales by 25 percent over the next two years
- Reduce sales cycle 30 percent, from six months to four months
- Use the new sales planner tool immediately after conference
- Improve sales negotiation skills
- Increase customer loyalty through value-driven account management

Most meetings are evaluated only on their basic event-satisfaction merits—the relevance of the agenda, speaker effectiveness, activities and breakouts, the comfort of the venue, and the quality of meals. While such feedback is essential for planning subsequent meetings, companies should not neglect measuring additional areas of meeting effectiveness such as attendee learning.

What new processes, sales strategies, policies, or regulations did the sales team learn at the event? And what is the proof of their having learned it? How were quizzes, surveys, self-assessments, role playing or other methodologies used to assess attendee comprehension?

And yet, proof of learning has little value unless people act on their knowledge. Without a corresponding change in behaviors, the new information may be useless. An even deeper data discovery, therefore, can be undertaken to determine how the salespeople are using their newly acquired knowledge or skills in the weeks or months following the meeting. One of the most effective ways to accomplish this is to have attendees complete individual Action Plans at the meeting. An Action Plan offers multiple advantages:

- A reminder of the meeting objectives and the rep's role in fulfilling it
- An on-the-job log for helping them measure their progress toward the objectives as well as note barriers and enablers
- Documentation that the company can request of the reps (with the option to protect anonymity, if desired) to measure behaviors/progress

For a more detailed exploration of these and additional measurement components see our white paper, [How to Measure Results for Tradeshows, Meetings & Events](#).

### **Conclusion**

Every detail, from agenda planning to post-meeting surveys, contributes to the effectiveness of a sales meeting. The success of the meeting can determine not only the team's sales performance, but their levels of motivation, morale, commitment to the company vision, goals and strategies, and sense of loyalty and community. When done with creativity, care, and crystal clear objectives, the meeting will prove a worthwhile investment of time and energy for the company and attendees alike.

**GetSynchronicity**

For more information, contact GetSynchronicity at  
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